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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A GESTALT PERCEPTION OF SUICIDE IN DRAMA

by

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submitted by Uwe T. A. Neumann

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor

Date 30 Sept 82

To Joachim, the small one, whose laughter is life.

ABSTRACT

The Gestalt mode of perception reveals the organically bound inter-relationship between the perceiver and his/her Umwelt. As a model for consciousness, it gives a unique illustration of the suicide and his/her survivor(s) in Frank Wedekind's Spring Awakening (Frühlings Erwachen), August Strindberg's Miss Julie (Fröken Julie) and Henrik Ibsen's Master Builder (Bygmester Solness). By a close textual analysis the impaired consciousness of the suicides is seen to be a reciprocation of their Umwelt's graduated "invitation" to commit the act.

No one takes my life from me,

but I lay it down of my own accord.

--John 10: 17-18.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been said that the only certainties of life are birth and death. There is but one entrance and, in a sense, a myriad of exits. The "choice" of exits is the topic of this study, when death is self-imposed. To the dramatist, it can be a lure, a final card that the character deals before his or her exit. Indeed, it can be argued that the parallel lines of life and art (if we hold to Aristotle's dictum of mimesis) intersect at the issue of suicide: neither the character nor the audience can see behind the "imitation," because in our limited existence we cannot see beyond the moment of death. "I reject you--I reject the world," the suicide says. Before this profoundest negation and most individualistic action there is no greater philosophical issue, as Camus claims. And it becomes a final dramatic issue, in these plays, when we see that the lot of the suicide, far from being a mere "reversal of fortune,"[1] is self-inflicted with the connivance of his survivors. He has, with their help, cast off life and embraced death.

The thesis developed in this study is that the relationship between the suicide and the survivors is symbiotically reciprocal. The dependency of the suicide on the people in his world is as profound as their rejection of him. Indeed, the relationships are so deeply integrated that the decline and fall of the victim will be seen as a response to an "invitational" process in which the final act takes its inevitable, organic place.

That it is a tainted symbiosis Chapter One lays out in its theoretical formulations: as in a Gestalt figure/ground mode of perception there are inseparably linked components, so are there similar bonds between perceiver and perceived in a consciousness diad. When the figure/ground is fallaciously perceived, there is a breakdown in the efficacy of the Gestalt and the victim proceeds to destroy himself. And because the survivors of the Umwelt (the ground) are inextricably linked into the Gestalt, they contribute to the suicide's demise. This component of the relationship has been called the "invitation" to suicide.

A brief history of the development of social and philosophical attitudes vis à vis suicide in the Western world concludes the introductory chapter.

How does the perceptual fallacy work? Chapter Two looks at two suicides--Moritz in Frank Wedekind's Spring Awakening and Julie in August Strindberg's Miss Julie. Both writers found the perceptual limitations devolved from the close-cropped, empirical observances of the Naturalist drama to restrict characters in their development and "broke through" into a psychologically more labile realm. Julie and Moritz are declining characters given to illusion, when contrasted against an unyielding and rising reality. The illusory quality--the perceptual fallacy--of their choices is shown in their speeches: utilizing Gestalt concepts of Introjection, Retrojection and Projection, the utterances of these characters are evaluated for fallacious content and at the same time, contrasted in a similar

manner with responses of their survivors. It will be seen that there is a compounding influence from their Umwelt.

By contrast, Ibsen's Solness is a man triumphant in his calling. The Master Builder, however, traces the tragic flaw of the self-made man--he is "alone at the top." Chapter Three explores how, having been pushed by "invitational" sets of circumstances to question the validity of his success, and through his faulty perceptual abilities, Solness has rendered his "self" as distorted. Increasingly his self-concept shrinks, to the benefit of the Umwelt, until the final option rears itself. By a close textual analysis, again, this deteriorative process is revealed.

Why did these characters choose suicide? The conclusion of Chapter Three charts the metaphysical waters of suicidal choice with the archetypal sextant: Faust. When Hamlet (wrongly) invokes "the Everlasting's..Canon 'gainst self-slaughter,"[2] it says more for his Elizabethan skills of rationalization than his knowledge of God's constraints. By the nineteenth century, Goethe's Mephistopheles is addressing modern man with what we may call a Gestalt challenge: "You are in the end...what you are."[3] And in these three plays we see the force of illusion and the deceit of a fixed consciousness by which Moritz, Julie and Solness would deny what they are.

INTRODUCTION

Notes

[1] Aristotle, Poetics, XI

[2] Shakespeare, Hamlet, I,ii.

[3] Goethe, Faust, Part I, 1 1806.

CHAPTER ONE

The Gestalt and History of Suicide

Introduction

The ultimate is always intrinsically inaccessible. The reasons for suicide as a personal and private act become no more comprehensible when they are dramatically rendered in a play. If we are to believe, however, in the validity of Aristotle's "necessity" as the arbiter of dramatic verisimilitude, we may profitably observe the relationships--the many connecting surfaces--between the suicides in Wedekind's Spring Awakening (Frühlings Erwachen), Strindberg's Miss Julie (Fröken Julie) and Ibsen's The Master Builder (Bygmester Solness), and those characters who surround them--for illustration of the central argument of this thesis, viz., that in these plays the "survivors" contribute, consciously and unconsciously, to the demise of the suicides, as conversely the suicides relinquish their hold on life through a process of impaired perceptions. And it is in this reciprocal relationship--this Gestalt --wherein we may view the act of suicide as identifying process between the survivors and the suicide.

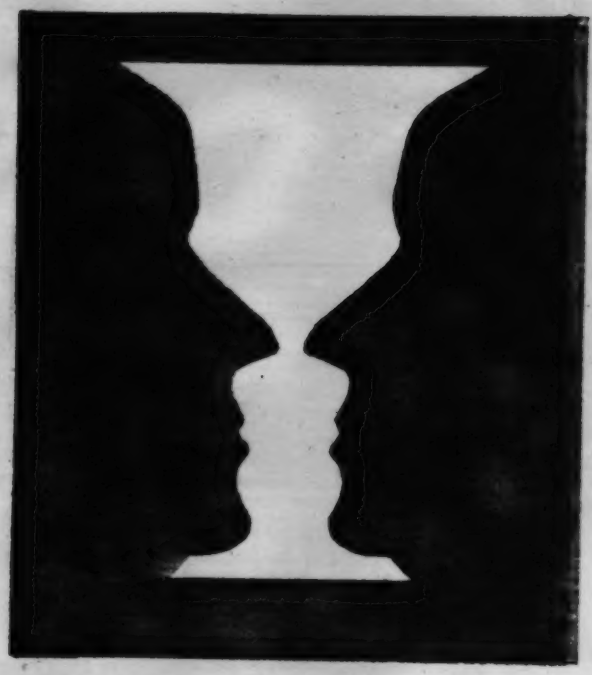
The suicides in these plays are conscious of their actions, and by intending to commit the act (though we know that any "intention to die" is almost always ambivalent) they are concerned with the specific meanings they and others give to their act, and indeed construct just those meanings for their behaviour which they want

others to accept. Thus, Moritz "becomes" a victim of an intolerably oppressive social system; Miss Julie "occupies" the relatively obsequious position from which she can be ordered to her death; and Solness self-consciously "sacrifices" himself as a failure of his own expectations. We shall see that in addition to an intention to die, there also is an intention to use suicide, on the part of these characters' survivors, both by "inviting" the victims to their doom, and by extracting the validity for their own continuing existence from that act. This interrelationship between victim and survivor we may cast into a Gestalt model.

The Gestalt Consciousness

Let us briefly define the conscious process of Gestalt perception. Hegel, carrying Hume and the other Empiricists forward, argued that the outside world is perceivable only through our bodily senses, over time, and through an intellectual process whereby we split the informational flow into discrete bits. We differentiate a given bit from its surround by "suppressing" the boundary between the two. The unit of thought then becomes the information bit, as distinguished from the unit non-bit,--what in computer terminology is known as a binary digit. It is the combination of the bit itself and its opposite as +/-.

In the Gestalt mode of perception, there is the famous interaction between the perceived figure (a white chalice) against a black background (two profile heads) as in the figure on page seven.



The Gestalt

One may, on continued inspection of this ambiguous figure, become adept at shifting from one way of neurally organizing the figure to another, but one can never organize it both ways at once. That is, we can perceive either a chalice or two silhouettes, but not both at the same time. Due to this neurological all-or-none phenomenon of visual receptor stimulation, when we shift from one image to another, what is seen is thus not a function of some actual modification of what is "out there" but rather, is brought about as a non-analytical function of dynamic interpretation, independent of the objective world. We are conscious only of one term of a figure/ground relationship while neglecting the other. The figure, say, dominating the field, will inevitably draw attention to that field. For example, in an environment characterized by

crowding, it is not the presence of others to which we become sensitized, but to privacy. In a room cluttered with furniture, it is not the furniture to which we become sensitized, but space. Conversely, in a large space containing only a single small object, like a crucifix, it is not the space we are sensitized to, but the object. Or in looking at trees against a sky, what is significant to us is the area outlined by the trees rather than the shape of the sky-space containing them. Yet for the photographer or painter, the shape of the "ground" is as important as the shape of the "figure."

In broader psychological terms, this is referred to as "consciousness." Consciousness is defined as "certain processes or events in the organism best described as...from the inside out --the individual is, as it were, inside what is happening."[1] That is, consciousness is the consciousness <u>of</u> something. Man is not separable from the world, some abstraction trapped momentarily in a locus of time and space. Elements of our conscious perceptions are the continual back-and-forth switching of the derivatives of our perceptual infrastructure, the linked components of the Gestalt.

If now the observer perceives himself as figure and the observed as field, this binary, non-analytical dialectical process becomes a Gestalt consciousness of the world, in an immediate and direct sense. At the same time, it becomes not just alone a consciousness of something, but a consciousness of <u>all</u> consciousness. In an existentialist formulation, such consciousness is a "validation"

of existence, to use Jean-Paul Sartre's term. It is no less than an attempt to bridge the profound gap between the conscious perceiver and the extended world around him.[2]

The Perceptual Fallacy

It follows that in the life of a suicide such a Gestalt is impaired, that his existence has become invalidated. There is a perceptual fallacy, to coin a term, based on an impaired interaction between figure and field. This is manifested at the contact boundary between figure and field, between the self and the environment. Where there should be smooth shifting of perspective between figure and field, there is instead, fixation and one-sided perspective and, by analogy, an inflexible consciousness. We will look at three types of perceptual fallacies: Introjection--impaired self-perception; Projection--impaired perception of others; and Retrojection--impaired perception of others' perceptions.

Introjection refers to an uncritical ingestion, as Fritz Perls had it, of whole, undifferentiated externals.[3] Common examples are the "swallowing" of dogma, faith, or totems. Common responses are intolerant reactions to perceived slights to cultural totems which the individual has internalized, such as miscegenation (an insult to "race"); rock music (an insult to "taste") etc. In terms of suicide, an example of Introjection--the self perceiving the self--would be: "If anyone kills himself he will get attention. I will kill myself. Therefore I will get attention." Though the

argument is logically sound, the error lies in the impaired perception of the self: there can be no self after death. The concept of self as egotistically (using this word in its colloquial sense) paramount has become introjected such that little of the real self is being experienced. As we have seen, Gestalt consciousness is defined as dialectically being conscious of all consciousness, with the perceiver able to shift between figure and ground in the Gestalt diad. Here the perceiver is the self as experienced by the individual himself, but his experiences and sensations, thoughts and feelings, are uncritically introjected. These stockpiled experiences are ever accumulating, with little real self left to be conscious of. If now we look at a speech utterance as being the figure of its own--unspoken--field, that silent component of the Gestalt would become the utterance's implication. In Strindberg's drama, for instance, we see Julie flexibly shifting tack, as the stage directions require, to facilitate her moving into Jean's world, sighting on his relationship with Christine, on his powerful upward social drive, and so forth. In each of these shifts, she moves from her own clear goal of teasing Jean onto the dance floor, to joining with him in a directly opposed movement, placating him, endorsing him. Indeed, it is the stuff of flirtation.

Later, when Miss Julie says to Jean, "I can't go away. I can't stay. Help me,"[4] by implication she is adding, "I am alone, and dependent on you." But this she cannot admit, for her focus of perception is narrowed to only one-half of the perceptual Gestalt

diad (the utterance), the dilemma immediately before her mind. Filled with a distorted sense of self, she cannot reverse her thinking to encompass the implication, that Jean has made her dependent on him, that she has failed to resist him. Dependency is not a usual part of an aristocrat's perception of her servant. Thus, she cannot recognize the mutuality of self and other, that to escape from the trap one must grow independent. Such a dialectic would lead to an unimpaired self-perception. Julie, however, is sufficiently impaired to become suicidally dependent.

The second type of perceptual fallacy is what is called Projection.[3] It is defined as the individual placing, in the outside world, those parts of his personality with which he cannot or will not identify, for instance, an unacceptable flaw. Thus, a bourgeois' laziness might be projected onto an Indian, and a liberal's innate racism onto a fascist. The issue is how the Umwelt is perceived. In Spring Awakening, Moritz complains to his good friend Melchior that he, Moritz, has been acutely embarrassed about sexual matters since he was five years old.[5] But when Melchior offers to enlighten him, he quickly backs away, citing homework chores as excuse for not learning more. Indeed, he wants Melchior to write a paper on human sexuality and hide it among his school books, so that he, Moritz, might accidentally come across it. Seen perceptually, Melchior is projecting his own dread and distaste of sexual matters onto the authorities. In turn, and in the aggregate, these projections lead to his breakdown.

Retrojection, the final type of Gestalt boundary impairment is, for suicides, the most dangerous kind of perceptual fallacy. Perls defined it as a function originally outer-directed that becomes turned inward.[3] (A non-lethal example of this is narcissism.) In reacting against aggression and hatred, the suicide turns his responses inward, and destroys himself. In a perceptual mode, it would be the individual as he feels himself thought of or experienced by others; his reputation, based on other people's actions, ideas, remarks, etc. For a suicide, thus, the response would be to what he believed was expected of him. In Ibsen's Master Builder, Solness might say in his assessment of the situation, "Aline loves her children's memory more than me. I dislike that. Therefore Aline dislikes me." Here the perceptual fallacy lies in the ambivalent use of the word "dislike." The dissonance that Solness feels at his wife's love for something he dislikes causes him to rationalize her behaviour toward him as a dislike. He has turned his negative feelings for a past experience in on himself.

The Invitation to Die

In Sylvia Plath's poem Lady Lazarus there is a relived suicide attempt:[6]

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else,
> I do it exceptionally well.
>
> I do it so it feels like hell.
> I do it so it feels real.
> I guess you could say I've had a call.

In her pursuit of her own death, Sylvia Plath treads a path of inevitability that results in a foregone conclusion. She has walked, as it were, this path before. Euripides ended the Baccae with the following lines:[7]

> There may be many shapes of mystery
> And many things God makes to be,
> Past hope or fear.
> And the men looked for cometh not,
> And a path is there where no man thought...
> So hath it fallen here.

And Martin Buber writes: "The act of suicide, it is a trap door which suddenly springs open."[8]

What do "call," "path," and "trap door" have in common? If we leave aside the suicidal act for a moment, and look at the life of the suicide as a living, interacting human, then we see that the difference between the life of the suicide and his death is not one of degree, but of quality. The qualifier of his life lies in the act of suicide. The very inevitability of his demise will be seen as, on the one hand, a denial of the survivors and their world; and on the other hand, a validation of himself. The affirmation of the "call," of the "path," and of the "trap door" is, since these are metaphors of escape from the survivors' world, a denial of that world.

If now the act of suicide is a qualitative response to the world of the survivors, it follows that that world in some way "invited" the response. Sidney Jourard postulates that "people destroy themselves in response to an invitation originating from others that they stop living."[9] He writes:

> ...people live in response to the experience of chronic invitations to continue living in some way or in any possible way. Life and death can be seen fruitfully as responses to an invitation or the experience of an invitation. The invitation is extended by others, that is, it originates in someone's consciousness, sometimes as a conscious wish that the person stop existing, in that way, or at all, sometimes as an unconscious wish; sometimes not so openly, but rather as an indifference to the continued existence of the person in question. In whatever mode the wish for death, or the indifference to continued existence, appears, it is communicated to the one whom we might call the suicide. He experiences himself as being invited to stop living, and he obliges. (Actually, he may only be invited to stop that way of living.) He may accept the invitation by shooting himself, taking sleeping pills, jumping off a bridge, or jumping into the path of a car; or he may commit suicide more slowly by stopping his projects, disintegrating himself such that he is ostensibly killed by germs and viruses that have killed him because his immunity mechanisms have been called out of action; or he commits suicide by suspending or diminishing his vigilance toward all the things that are always present to kill a person, but which ordinarily he avers or neutralizes when he experiences his existence as having value, when he has things to do, and projects to fulfill.

That there are irrational components in our relationships with one another can be seen also in positive examples of seemingly selfless behaviour--leaving aside the currently popular explanations of psychobiology--such as (inappropriate) generosity, heroism in war and natural disasters, and the many acts of assistance given every moment without which a society as we know it would be impossible. Granted that these may not be fully selfless acts, that odds rapidly calculated by an experienced rescuer, for instance, can make what for us seems a reckless gamble into a more reasonable venture. And we may not exclude an individual's "hidden agenda" in a helping gesture: testing oneself, or needing to appear heroic, etc. (The literature on

altruism, indeed, is largely dedicated to explaining the phenomenon of the Good Samaritan.) Nevertheless, no explanation, however universal, seems able to supplant the irreduceable, irrational core of our existence. Jourard's "invitation" to suicide--though the term is uncomfortably close to suggesting a conscious structure--will serve for our purposes to close the Gestalt relationship.

We may further introduce, for purposes of comparison, the phenomenologically based models of perceptual awareness which have converted Husserl's doctrines of bracketing, intuition and intentionality into patterns of optimally helpful intervention.[10] (One emanation of Husserl's phenomenology is Carl Rogers' "client-centered therapy".)[11] An individual cast in this disinterested and receptive frame of mind--as illustrated by the perceptive and flexible behaviour of Mrs. Gabor vis à vis her son--will serve to measure the variance between the survivor's potential and actual self, the degree to which he acts in an "invitational" manner.

Thus, we see how Julie, having changed roles with her servant Jean after offering herself to him, becomes manipulated into a position of humbling obsequiousness by the more forceful Jean. Jean drops his mask, assumes a position of superiority, and psychologically destroys Julie with contempt and derision. He reduces her to a position of stealing from her father, but on the Count's untimely return, suddenly resumes his own position as servant to his master. Julie sees the untenable position she is in--being slave to a servant--and accepts Jean's proffered razor.

The invitation for Solness to kill himself is rather clearly depicted in the young woman Hilde's request to climb, one more time, to the top of a steeple to place a commemmorative wreath. Indeed, she shouts triumphantly when he falls to death. Solness, unable graciously to cede his place in the builder's profession to the young and ambitious generation behind-personified by his struggling assistant Ragnar--and in an attempt to rid himself of accumulated guilt feelings, and for having built "nothing" (as he sees it) over the years--is seduced by Hilde to destroy himself.

And in Spring Awakening, there is the self-serving motive of school officials and the expectations of Moritz's parents that help to drive him, under an unmanageable academic load, to self-inflicted death. But even his friend Melchior "invites" the suicidal response when he reinforces Moritz's narcissistic retrojection--his fantasy of the headless queen who marries the two-headed king and is "headed" by him, together with a fulsome description of the ensuing (onanistic) lovemaking, a fantasy in which he continues to see himself as a headless queen--by writing for Moritz an article of sexual education, which functions even more to destabilize the boy. Similarly, in the scene between Ilse and Moritz, we shall examine an ambivalent message from Ilse about a fantasy suicide that is perilously timed to coincide with his own self-murder.

These, then, are characters at a point in their lives where they have become aware of their survivors' "invitation" to spring

through Buber's trap door. The organic bond with the others is perceived as oppressively tight or loosely indifferent, and, rather than remaining in an untenable relationship, they individually accept the invitation tendered them to break out. Unable to perceive "another way of living," the narrowed perspective of the perceptual fallacy ushers them through the trap door into death.

An important caveat to bear in mind is that this model of consciousness in dramatic suicide does not include either a heroic or patriotic sacrifice, nor the Stoic argument, viz., that a life grown weary and dependent is not worth living. Clearly, there is no perceptual impairment, for instance, in Shakespeare's Cleopatra and her decision to kill herself. She saw the alternative of capture by the Romans as ignominious and unacceptable to her as Egyptian queen. There is no impairment now, at the point of her death, as there was none during her life, which was marked by a shrewdness and competence few characters in literature have shown. The suicides in the present study have no Cleopatra-like alternative, since their choice for death is as impaired as their choices have been throughout life--with the important exception of Solness, as we shall see. Moritz's escape (attempt) to America, for instance, is a precursor to his escape (success) into death. But, like Hamlet's "undiscovered country...from which no traveller returns,"[12] it is the only choice. That is the nature of these suicides' fallacy: their choice of death becomes the paradoxical qualifier of their lives. Their perception is that of an imperfect world, in which they cannot succeed, and thus the denial becomes a (perverse)

self-affirmation. The Gestalt is now complete.

History

What was the socio-historical canopy under which these fin-de-siècle authors placed their characters? Historically, suicide had long been considered a crime. Until the nineteenth century in England, the corpses of suicides were dragged about the streets by horses, buried at a crossroads with a wooden stake driven through them and a heavy rock over their faces. These latter measures were to prevent their ghosts from arising, but should that occur, their ghosts would be knocked down by traffic or lose their way! In 1823 this custom was abolished by legislation. Burial became private, though at night and without benefit of clergy. By 1882 suicides were permitted day-time burials, but the ban on clergy attendance was maintained.

Such religious scruple was not in evidence in the Old Testament, where the suicides of Samson, who killed himself and the Philistines by pulling down the pillars of a temple (Judges 16: 28-31); Saul, who committed suicide to avoid capture after losing a battle (I Samuel 31: 1-6); Abimelech, who was fatally wounded by a woman and decided to erase this ignominy by killing himself (Judges 9: 54); and Ahitophel, who hanged himself when he betrayed David to Absolom (2 Samuel 17: 23), all go unpunished by God or society.

Indeed, even mass suicide seems to have been condoned, as in the celebrated example at Masada, where the Romans had driven a

band of almost one thousand rebellious Israelites to a mountain top redoubt overlooking the Dead Sea and where, after painstaking military and engineering tactics the Romans finally managed to breach their defences. Rather than surrender as slaves, the Israelites drew lots and had ten of their men kill the rest. Then one of the ten killed the other nine and committed suicide himself. Masada has remained a symbol of patriotic determination and resistance to tyranny in present-day Israel.

The Romans, too, as the Greeks before them, considered certain untenable situations as eminently worthy of suicide: to show bereavement (Portia over Brutus); to preserve honour (Lucrece); to avoid pain and shame (Brutus); and for the benefit of the state (the Emperor Otho).

But suicide as a popular alternative to life received by no means a blanket approval from ancient philosophers. Socrates, as reported by Plato in the Phaedo, thought that man was the property of the gods and that killing oneself would invite their punishment, but the permission of the gods could be made manifest in the face of necessity, such as in Socrates' own death.

For the Pythagoreans, suicide was a form of rebellion. Athenaeus, in the Deipnosophists writes:[13]

> that the souls of all men were bound to the body, and in the life which is on earth, for the sake of punishment; and that God has issued an edict that if they do not remain there until he voluntarily releases them himself they shall fall into more numerous and more important calamities. On which account all men, being afraid of those threatenings of the gods, fear to depart from life by their own act, but only gladly

> welcome death when it comes in old age, trusting that the deliverance of their soul will take place with the full consent of those who have the power to sanction it. And this doctrine we ourselves believe.

Aristotle, in his condemnation of suicide, considers it an unlawful retaliatory act:[14]

> Therefore the suicide commits injustice; but against whom? It seems to be against the state rather than against himself; for he suffers voluntarily, and nobody suffers injustice voluntarily. This is why the state exacts a penalty; suicide is punished by certain marks of dishonour, as being an offence against the state.

Eventually, philosophers' attitudes began to approximate the popular practice. Epicurus, for instance, held that if life ceases to be a pleasure, the remedy for a free man was to end it; and the Stoics, too, regarded it as part of human freedom that a man continue to live by his own consent. These two utilitarian philosophies greatly influenced the Romans. Seneca argued that suicide should act as an escape from the punishments of suffering and old age, reserving only a general duty to live, if one were still useful, for one's family.[15]

> I will not relinquish old age if it leaves my better part intact. But if it begins to shake my mind, if it destroys its faculties one by one, if it leaves me not life but breath, I will depart from the putrid or tottering edifice. I will not escape by death from disease so long as it may be healed, but leaves my mind unimpaired. I will not raise my hand against myself on account of pain, for so to die is to be conquered. But if I know that I must suffer without hope of relief, I will depart, not through fear of pain itself, but because it prevents all for which I live.

Cato the Younger, Pliny the Elder, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius took much the same position. In the wasteland of brutality,

corruption and treachery of Imperial Rome, the right to die rose like an oasis.

Cicero was ambivalent on the issue. Though he praised Cato's life and suicide, and lauded the "opportunity for dignity" that suicide offered, he nevertheless often codemned it as an abandonment of duty, and as a shaking off of destiny with which the suicide has been charged. In the Somnum Scipionis, Scipio is warned by the shades of his ancestors that he would never be able to join them if he were to commit suicide.[16] By and large, Imperial Roman law prohibited suicide on economic grounds (criminals, soldiers and slaves, for instance, were expressly forbidden to kill themselves); and Athenian law was based on religious grounds. The right to commit suicide had to be acquired from the authorities and was granted only under especially trying circumstances.

The basically agnostic and anti-social nature of the act kept it officially unacceptable to both Church and State--and very much alive as a philosophical issue--over the following centuries. In the Jewish tradition, Josephus, the commander of a defeated army --in the same war against the Romans during which the celebrated sacrifice as Masada occurred--opposed the expressed wish by his soldiers to kill themselves by arguing that suicide was an unnatural act, and that the soul was received from God, so that its casting out was a wicked act.

Until 250 A.D., suicide was fairly common among early Christians. There was a desire, often hysterically expressed in

groups, to be with Christ. Indeed, the absence of any express prohibition of suicide in the Bible (the Sixth Commandment presumably was not yet interpreted as applying to suicide), and Paul's apparent reference to martyrdom in I Corinthians 13 ("Though I give my body to be burned and have no charity, it profiteth me nothing.") led to three types of especially common forms of martyrdom: voluntary martyrdom; the starvation death of the ascetic; and the chastity vow of the suicidal virgin. Much of this behaviour was in anticipation of a Second Coming of Christ, and when that failed to materialize, and when the return to a pagan/tribal dread of death swept through the lowest echelons of the late Roman Empire-Early Dark Ages, the Church began to prohibit suicide.[17]

St. Augustine, in particular, was instrumental in bringing the Church's attention to the issue of suicide as a sin by interpreting the Sixth Commandment as applicable to self-murder. The suicide, he argued, surrendered any hope of absolution. He circumnavigated the Biblical suicides by suggesting that they had been divinely inspired.[18]

Self-murder now became a serious offence. In 533, the Second Council of Orleans ruled that the Church could receive offerings of those killed committing a crime, but not those of suicides. In 563 the Council of Braga denied the suicide regular funeral rites and in 1284 the Synod of Nîmes denied consecrated interment for the suicides. At about this time the custom of dragging the suicide's corpse about the streets began.

St. Thomas Aquinas added three arguments to St. Augustine: suicide was contrary to natural inclination, natural law, and the charity of man himself; the suicide deprived society of his activity; and he usurped the function of God.[19]

Montaigne was the first to challenge the notion of the soul as being a depositum from God. He argued that the most forgiveable reason for suicide was pain and the fear of suffering a painful death.[20] As a young man John Donne wrote a defence of suicide in his Bianthanatos (published posthumously in 1644), in which he opined that the prohibition of suicide was to keep the economic value of labour from becoming lost.[21] In addition, the Protestant notion of each man's uniqueness was expressed: "a private man is Emperor of himself, sui juris."[22]

Shakespeare, in his eight tragedies (including fourteen suicides) presumably contributed to a more general, and less judgmental, acceptance of suicide with such archetypal renditions of the human soul in anguish as Hamlet, Lear and Brutus.

In the narrower philosophical discussions of Motesquieu's Persian Letters, both sides of the argument are presented in the form of letters between imaginary correspondents. Suicide, he argued, did not "disturb the order of Providence" any more than any other act of man altering matter, and consequently the despoilation of the corpse was unjust. In the same Letters, however, he states that maintaining the unity of body and soul was the highest form of submission to the will of the Creator. In the Grandeur

and Declension of the Roman Empire, he lauded the Roman practice of suicide for giving "every one the liberty of finishing his part on the stage of the world, in what scene he pleased."[23]

Voltaire's criticism of the prohibition against suicide was even sharper: how was suicide contrary to the dictates of Christianity when killing (in war) was not?[24]

Hume's Essay on Suicide (1783) expanded on Montesquieu: man was of no more significance in the universe than an oyster. "If I turn aside a stone which is falling on my head, I disturb the course of nature and I invade the peculiar province of the Almighty by lengthening my life beyond the period which, by the general laws of matter and motion, he has assigned to it." Hume also dismissed the social argument: "A man who retires from life does no harm to society; he only ceases to do good; which if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind." The reciprocity of responsibility between the individual and society is waived when the suicide withdraws. Indeed, when life becomes a burden, such withdrawal is recommended.[25]

We have constructed the notion of a "perceptual fallacy" that, as we shall see in subsequent discussion, functions to prevent the suicide from envisioning a viable alternative to his/her plight. The non-viability of suicide (as alternative) was first proposed (albeit in different terms) by Schopenhauer: he regarded suicide as "error" in that it offers only an apparent--and not real--release from life and its sufferings. Human will, according

to Schopenhauer, exists outside of a space and time frame, but since it is at the same time a part of the human being, the suicide does not in fact kill it when he destroys himself. He succeeds in destroying only "its manifestation at this place and time."[26]

But it did not follow, to Schopenhauer, that suicide was a sin, or crime, since "it quite obviously seems that there is nothing in the world to which every man has a more unassailable title than his own life and person."[27] He decried the ignominious burials of suicides and the seizure of their property. The clergy should be challenged, he said, "to explain what right they have to go into the pulpit or to take up their pens and stamp as a crime an action which many men whom we hold in affection and honour have committed; and to refuse an honourable burial to those who relinquish this world voluntarily."[28]

Mme. de Staël took the orthodox view that suicide was immoral and irreligious[29] and William James thought that the rejection of suicide was implicit in the belief that life is worth living.[30]

Among modern writers, there came an increasing trend toward a greater freedom of choice for the suicide. This was buttressed by physical and psychological arguments of sympathy for the sufferer. Psychological and sociological studies--foremost among the Emile Durkheim's Le Suicide (1897)--also suggest that suicide is a problem of psychiatry or social engineering rather than of abstract morals.

Certainly this shift of focus to the environmental and

psychological domains was underway by the time of the Naturalist dramatists. Büchner had already written: "Suicide caused by physical and psychic suffering is not suicide, it is death by disease."[31] Naturalism's thrust had been to demythologize the shibboleths of Victorian theatre by championing the empirical scientific methods so controversially brought to bear on the intellectual forum elsewhere. These methods--especially in the biological sphere--had fuelled assaults on the Church (Darwin's theory of evolution versus creationism); and society (economic laissez-faire, with its inherent notion of survival of the fittest, versus a decaying aristocracy). The more detailed influences on the writers of this study will be discussed below. For the moment, let it suffice to establish that suicide, given the intellectual climate of the time, became one of the dramatic vessels on the creative seas where society's discontents served as essays of discovery.

CHAPTER ONE

Notes

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[25] David Hume, Philosophical Works, ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1874), Vol. II pp. 406 ff., "Essay on Suicide."

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[31] Georg Büchner, "Über den Selbstmord," in Georg Büchner: sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. by W. R. Lehmann (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1971) p. 22. (Quotation tr. by this writer.)

CHAPTER TWO

Spring Awakening and Miss Julie: The Limits of Naturalism

Introduction

Both Wedekind and Strindberg took early and radical departures from prevailing nineteenth century bourgeois theatre--farce, music hall comedy and light romantic pieces--by utilizing, and through their unique abilities contributing to, the so-called Naturalist drama. A serious attempt at keeping dramatic pace with the advancing discoveries of natural, biological and social sciences, even Naturalism's more candid domain, however, could not hold the dramatic imaginations of these writers. Thus, only certain components of Spring Awakening and Miss Julie can be unreservedly identified as Naturalist.

In Greek drama, man had been presented as contingent on Fate, or Moira. Lying even beyond the power of the gods, Fate influenced all creatures. Made manifest over time, it determined man's limitations and fortunes and needed no rational "motivational" explanations. Moreover, Fate was not supernatural: it was seen as part of Nature and was administered by the Gods, who frequently were in evidence as natural manifestations. With his Fate preordained, though unknown, it remained for the Greek dramatic hero to choose from among his options, not necessarily the most sensible course, but rather, to choose in accordance with divine law. Misfortune was seen as divine punishment for some transgression against divine

law--conspicuous waste, say, or overweening pride. Thus, the nobility of a tragic hero lay in the quality of personality with which he met his doom, which thus became self-made. There were no "solutions," or "explanations" to Greek tragic Fate.

In a Christian cosmology, transgression against divine law was replaced by sin, the consequences of which all men could avoid through Grace. "Tragic" heroes were thus no longer blindly exposed to the hegemony of Fate. If they were in a state of Grace, at their point of death, eternal life in Paradise followed. (We see Hamlet hesitating, for instance, at the point of killing his uncle--avenging his father's murder--because the man is at prayer, and therefore eligible for Grace.)[1]

However, with the dogma-shaking challenges of the eighteenth century philosophes; with the Industrial Revolution and its disruption of parish life; and with the momentous "explanations" of the world and its functions provided by advances in biology, archeology, geology, and later by the social sciences, we come to the point where man was cast into challenging the verities of the traditional world of social, spiritual and intellectual orders.

German Naturalist drama, a relatively short-lived phenomenon --from 1885 to 1895--with a good deal of it shaped by foreign writers such as the early Ibsen, Zola, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and the sociologist Comte, the evolution works of Lamarque and Darwin, the economic theories of Marx, and the philosophy of Nietzsche (particularly his God-defying Übermensch), was an attempt at dramatically reifying this

perceived emancipation from the traditional Weltanschauung.

In sum, their views illustrated the bare Naturalist philosophy of man: class-bound, in stress with himself and society, a product of evolved and biologically fixed history. The Naturalists strove to emulate the Positivist model of scientific discovery wherein the world was viewed as an interlocking and unified process, the machinations of which could be reduced to "laws"--illustrated by the systematic gathering of explicit and objective data, inducted logically into theories--from which man emerged stripped of his metaphysical fancy and finitely contingent on the random allocation of genetic endowment, moving through the shaping forces of his environment. Echoing the great store placed in man's problem-solving faculties by members of the scientific community, Naturalists proceeded to analyze dramatic reality in terms of natural "forces" like heredity, environment and biological drives. Inevitably their focus came down to the hard, sordid aspects of life, where with relentless detail they cast lower-class lives onto the stage, lives rendered helpless by inheritance laws of nature (as in Ibsen's Ghosts); lives victimized by the cruelties of a drunken paterfamilias (Holz and Schlaf's Familie Selicke); or the lives of a desperately poor proletariat (Hauptmann's Die Weber). In addition, society's four-square institutions were challenged: Church, whose conservatism and alliance with governing powers was seen as hypocritical; family, whose repression and mistrust of youth was put to question; school, whose demands for unquestioned obedience and

fact-cramming approach to education were castigated; and the courts, whose illiberal support of the property class was unacceptable. The Naturalists' intention in all this was to create understanding of the processes by which social and private lives were steered, and the contingencies which delimited them.

Dramatic necessitas (in the Aristotelian, sequential sense) now moved away from the logic of preordination and assumed an unmediated and milieu-bound command. Stage directions became elaborate plans of the minutest detail--to the degree that many could not be faithfully produced. The aim, again, was to expose the forces--minute in their detail, irresistible in their aggregation--of the environment that made man into not the idealist searcher of the preceding Romantic period, but the Massenmensch of the new capitalistic industrial age.

Zola called upon the dramatist to "teach the truth"[2] of this new age in small unnoticed doses, woven into the text. On the one hand, the natural processes of flesh-and-bones reality was to be unsentimentally observed (not fabricated) and explained through logical argumentation, facts and dispositions. Shaw's Underwood, for instance, could cleverly (and genially) outline the value of economic determinism by citing, as evidence, the well-kept and properly clad lives of the munitions workers and their families in his purvey.[3] On the other hand, if the greatest proportion of human behaviour was seen to be irrationally, not rationally, motivated, then Naturalist characters came equipped with, for instance,

Jung's "collective unconscious" or Freud's "unconscious": those aspects of personality which function at pre-logical and normally inaccessible levels, beyond the reach of reason and conditioning, often with self-destructive results. Thus, the "logic of sensation and sentiment"[4] lends a fine realism to Zola's Thérèse Raquin, in which two characters are driven, helpless in their sexual passion, to the point of murder.

As a result, the importance of the plot began to fade. Dramatic power increasingly resided in the scene itself. It was the scene and its particular order among the others, which cast the mood for the play, becoming epic-like and increasingly independent from the rest of the play. The astonishing power of the last scene of Ibsen's Doll's House, for example, was due in part to its very unexpectedness: Nora had not been inducted logically, through the plot, to the door-slamming challenger of female emancipation that she became. She suddenly burst through the perplexed and defensive Torvald's artifices, quite without warning. If nature and its processes were random, so were the scenes of Naturalist drama required to be random. If human consciousness, as the analyses of "depth psychology" were revealing, was non-lineal, then the play must chart some non-evident course too.

The total result was a radically new form of drama. To resume the nautical metaphor, gone were the semaphores of plot and characterization. If the audience's expectations were no longer contingent on the shifting fate of the hero, it was because the

hero increasingly became a function of the scene, of his context. If, indeed, the scene was its own signal, it followed that all its components became a Gestalt-like totality. As setting, the scene needed to be accurately portrayed. For Thérèse Raquin Zola worked painstakingly on his settings: "I tried continually to bring my setting into perfect accord with the occupations of my characters, in order that they might not play, but rather live, before the audience."[5]

The identifier of mood also became manifest in speech. Naturalist form de-emphasized the self-conscious and artificial components of contemporary acting--letting the inherent naturalness of the characters live through the actor (giving rise to the much regarded Stanislavsky Method of acting)--and inevitably causing the Naturalist dramatists to listen to the language of the social classes qua social classes, heretofore unrepresented on the stage. Regional dialects and working-class accents were presented as dramatic constructs of the play. The severe Silesian brogue of Hauptmann's weavers, for instance, is starkly offset by the smooth officialese of the Establishment characters, fatally underscoring the helplessness of the weavers' plight. In Shaw's rhetorical plays, dramatic encounters were strongly cognitive, with different (operatic) "voices" clashing in discourse, each voice identifying a competing viewpoint. And in Miss Julie, the rising tensions portrayed by Strindberg between his antagonists are heightened by the class differences that exist between them, as they are exposed by their

different speech patterns and rhythms. For instance, Julie's use of the archaic-formal third person singular when referring to Jean (before their sexual encounter) shifts to the intimate second-person "du" after the event. This usage suggests an equivalence between the characters that proves to be illusory, as later in the play, in passionate anger, she reverts to the--now insulting --third person.

The Naturalists' desire, then, to rid the stage of transparent fictionality and to introduce a measure of realism ("life"), resulted in language becoming the barometer of feeling, of state-of-being, both within characters and between them. The play's language thus becomes a legitimate subject for close textual analysis of the dynamic processes that constitute the motivation of the characters.

Naturalist virtues, notwithstanding, became their very limitations. Because Naturalism made it easier to switch between the fictional world and the real world, even if the fictional world was discontinuous from the real world, the audience shared in the currency of symbols, myths, popularized science, etc., that was spent between the characters. The "givens" of the dramatic world were as real as those with which the audience was confronted. There was nothing unreal, for instance, about the dawning existential awareness of the audience--their dependent, contingent, random and isolated existence. A sense of historical tragedy had crept into the European consciousness. Where tragedy had existence only on the Greek stage (not in Greek life), by the nineteenth century

it had become a part of history. If the tragic fate of the Greek hero was revealed to the audience through his quality of choices, i.e., his noble consciousness to which the Greek audience aspired, the modern protagonist's sense of fate (of causality) was shared by the audience. Science had replaced the older metaphysical concepts of Fate with an historical concept that allowed man to have a personal understanding of history, where before he had a personal understanding of Fate. Indeed, Nietzsche focussed on this readjustment, arguing that man had turned away from the "tragic dignity" of theology to the "tragic dignity" of history, and showing that if there was something "poetic" about the illusion of a stable metaphysical structure personally concerned with the fate of man, there could be something equally "poetic" about the nineteenth century illusion or belief in the sense of the individual's place in the historical process.[6] Motivation for action (i.e., choice) in modern, historical man was thus no longer circumstantial, but was challenged to become direct and autonomous.

And therein lay the Naturalist limitations: man's "autonomy" was clearly limited. The empirical, inductive perspective of Naturalist dramatists cut short the Aristotelian apology for the drama's raison d'être, viz., to create a set of possible truths in a fictive world. By restricting themselves to the Positivist "givens" of the Industrial world, Naturalists avoided the Existentialist challenge lying beyond: the dread of finiteness, uncertainty and death--which man must choose to answer if he was not to exist

meaninglessly. Historical man was also Existentialist man, who must "fill himself" (in Sartre's words), who must create every moment. And if he is to create validity for the moment--like an actor who must create emotionality about something that does not exist--then he must transcend the state of affairs of the external world, thus incorporating the moment's intention and creating its own emotionality. By its very definition, the Naturalist drama could not conceptualize this Existential expansion of reality, and the theatre gravitated toward the illusionist qualities of the Impressionist drama which went beyond Science's rootedness in "explaining" natural phenomena by venturing beyond the "givens" and asking: why are there the things that are, rather than nothing? It remained for the Expressionist and Dadaist drama to venture deeper into this beyond.

Wededkind and Strindberg were dramatists who realized Naturalism's limitations. Their characters, though milieu-bound and hung on the ropes of class and biology, nevertheless begin to form philosophical discussions, idealizations and verbal dreaming which sets them apart from the amoral and mechanistic "types" of a Zola. Here, Wedekind is the artistic heir to Büchner. Writing a good sixty years before, Büchner introduced to the German theatre the Epic structure of drama--loosely aggregated, cinematically short, non-logically sequenced scenes, remarkably autonomous in and of themselves, for the first time telling stories of socially despised characters with crude motives, living execrable and fully contingent lives. They are the anti-heroic archetypes of the later Existential

theatre. Further, the characters' desperation was heightened by Büchner's ironic use of humour, which served to aggravate the tragic mood. Woyzeck, Büchner's archetype here, is so stupidly bovine, so given to swinish urges and knee-jerk responses--indeed, he is paraded before a class of medical students as a finitely reduced stimulus-response organism--that he elicits a kind of freakish humour. Büchner successfully caricatured the grotesque irony of Science "typifying" humans into diseases, such that, though the operation might be successful, the patient died.

Wedekind, with similarly slashing strokes, limns his pedagogues in Spring Awakening as symbolic targets of the Naturalist argument against society's repression of youth. Revolving around an adolescent suicide, who succumbs to pressures from a largely brutal and hypocritical adult society, the play's controversial slant resulted in a delay of fifteen years after its first publication before it was first staged by Max Reinhardt on 20 November 1906. Censored forthwith, it was not freely produced until 1912.

Spring Awakening

Spring Awakening (Frühlings Erwachen) consists of three acts, the first of three scenes and the others of seven scenes each. Time elapsed during the play is from early Spring until Fall, from first adolescent awakenings of desire to a confrontation with death in a graveyard during a night in November. The story concerns the pubescent

struggle of three hapless bourgeois teenagers living in Imperial Germany around 1890. In loosely arranged scenes, Wedekind shows their incompetent treatment at the hands of their teachers and parents. There is the fourteen-year old Wendla Bergmann, ignorant about sexual matters, who is fended off by her mother with a fairy tale of the stork when she enquires about details of her older sister's third birth. Unbelieving, Wendla threatens to ask the chimney sweep whether or not the stork comes down the chimney. Finally, with much protest, Frau Bergmann consents to "enlighten" Wendla in the matter. And she tells her daughter that what is required is to "love one's husband,"[7] and that is all.

There are the two unevenly matched boys, Moritz Stiefel and Melchior Gabor. Moritz, fearful and worrisome to the degree of impairment--as we shall see--is under enormous pressure to perform well at school by both his parents and the school authorities. His abilities are simply overtaxed. Melchior, his best friend, seems to Moritz to be a rational, almost enlightened young man, easily the best pupil at school, treated with kindness and tolerance by his mother. Having researched the matter of human sexuality, Melchior offers to write an essay on the subject for Moritz, so that the latter might cease his tortuous ruminations and heated fantasies. But the writing has the opposite effect, and instead, keeps Moritz from his studies. The results are disastrous: fearful that his probationary pass will end in failure, he appeals in a letter to Melchior's mother for financial assistance to flee to

America, but to no avail. Finally, in desperation, he shoots himself.

Melchior and Wendla, meanwhile, encounter each other. The girl arouses and confuses the boy, whereby he beats her in a perverse sado-masochistic act: she wants empathically to relate to her friend Martha Bessel, beaten "night after night."[8] In their next meeting, not fully coincidental, they seduce one another. During the seduction Wendla pleads naively not to be kissed, believing that to be an expression of love. After Moritz's suicide, Melchior is interrogated by a fatuous and vicious faculty council regarding Melchior's essay on sexuality found among Moritz's belongings, and supposed by them to be the cause of the death. He is expelled forthwith. Finally, even his mother's love is turned from Melchior by his father's denunciation of him and he is delivered into a correctional home for boys.

Wendla, meanwhile, succumbs to the poisonous ministrations for abortion at the hands of her mother's best friend, while the charade is maintained that she is suffering from chlorosis, otherwise known as the "virgin's disease."[9]

In the last--quite surrealistic--scene, Melchior has escaped from the correctional home, and is hunting for Wendla's grave. He finds it, and encouters Moritz's walking corpse, carrying its severed head. The two boys begin a surrealistic conversation, during which Melchior, feeling guilty over Wendla's death and abetted by Moritz's gloomy discourse on life, momentarily contemplates suicide by reaching for Moritz's proffered hand. Suddenly the "vermummte Herr" ("masked

man") enters. His identity remains unknown throught the scene. Melchior believes him to be Mephistopheles, because of the tempting offers he makes of widening Melchior's experiential horizons. Posited by some critics as a symbol for indestructible life[10]--indeed Wedekind dedicated the play to him--this mysterious character forcibly confronts Moritz and his seductive depiction of life-after -death and leads Melchior off stage to end the play.

There are several themes to be found. The first one is that of misplaced trust. Wendla trusts her mother, who is the only person in the world she has loved. ("I've never loved anyone but you, Mamma, only you...")[11] Frau Bergmann has instructed her poorly on the facts of life by letting Wendla believe that the way to get children was to "love a man"--only. Herself the product of a hypo-critical morality--and here we see Wedekind's similarity of purpose with the Naturalists--Frau Bergmann was unable to relate honestly to Wendla, to give straight answers to her daughter's impassioned questioning. Indeed, there is betrayal all round: the doctor, a caricature like the teachers, named in the original Medizinalrat Dr. v. Brausepulver (Dr. Effervescent Water), breaking his professional code by discussing a former patient (named specifically as Baroness von Witzleben--"funny life")[12]--let alone the issue of so incompetent a misdiagnosis as a pregnancy; Frau Bergmann's charade of accepting the doctor's misdiagnosis as a pregnancy; and finally, the brutality of performing an abortion on an unsuspecting victim. The lie--death by chlorosis--is even etched onto Wendla's gravestone. Because

we know Frau Bergmann to be a kind-hearted and loving woman, it is clear that these murderous consequences arise from the fatalistic and repressive tenets of bourgeois society of Wedekind's time, against which there was no institutionalized recourse.

A further theme--indeed, the aetiology of the theme of misplaced trust--is that of hypocritical morality. A shibboleth for Naturalists, it is a theme of deep and unforgiving resentment of the social times: elders behaving contrary to what they teach their young. Moreover, false morality is contrasted with Positivist images of youth--Melchior is a model empiricist--and seen to be (socially) more powerful. Indeed, natural curiosity results in disastrous consequences for Wendla, and good common sense--what we call sex education today--means incarceration for Melchior. Against all the natural expresssion of restless young people there fall in place the unnatural barriers of their elders.

The first row of defenders are the institutional representatives: teachers, clergymen and warders with names like Hallowe'en masks. Keepers of a perverse morality, they subvert their office. When Pastor Kahlbauch[13] condemns the hapless Moritz to "eternal damnation"[14] he is reinforcing the self-serving double-talk of Rector Sonnenstich:[15]

> Suicide is the most unforgiveable rejection of the moral order and in virtue of that very fact the most powerful reflection of the moral order, in so far as the very act of suicide itself absolves the moral order from the need to pass sentence at the very same time as the act itself confirms the moral order in its own existence.

The fathers of the victimized boys, moreover, abdicate their

responsibilities. Moritz's father literally disowns him ("He was no son of mine..")[16] and Melchior's father pompously announces, at the critical moment in his family's life:[17]

> For many years, Fanny, I have observed in silence your interesting educational methods, and have held my peace--although they were quite contrary to my own views. I have always believed that a child is not a toy but must be raised with expert care and seriousness. However, I said to myself that a sufficient abundance of native intelligence and goodwill in one parent could perhaps take the place of the priciples of the other, even though such principles had been acquired by a lifetime of work and study. I have no wish to offer you any reproaches, Fanny. But please do not stand in my way when I now take steps to repair the damage that we both of us have done the boy.

(One can only marvel at the energies of self-restraint the Judge must have expended over the years.) No "repair" of course ensues: he simply manoevres his (powerless) wife into abandoning the perfectly normal boy to the reformatory.

The mothers, though genuinely caring for their children, are impotent against the prevailing social forces. Though Melchior's mother displays an enlightened curiosity about the boys' welfare, encouraging them to find their own way, we see that she has no power to fight against the dominance of her husband at the crucial time. Wendla's mother, fatally limited in her understanding, is a product of the same false morality that she would pass on to her daughter. And of Moritz's mother there is mention only once, in passing, at his grave site.

The irreconcileable opposition of the hypocritical bourgeois ideology of the adults and the clean, natural and unselfconscious

world of the young is illustrated in the very short scene (II,v) --the heart of the play--where Wendla walks out in the garden:[18]

> Why did you come out? To pick violets. Because Mamma can see me smiling. Lips always apart now. Why? I don't know. I don't know any words...
>
> This path is a soft carpet--no stones, no twigs--I'm floating...How I slept--there was no night.
>
> Here they grow...Oh--I'm a nun at communion. Sweet violets. All right, Mamma dear. I'll wear my sackcloth now. Oh God, if someone would come I would throw my arms around, tell them everything.

In this hour after the strongest natural drives had joined her to Melchior, there is no talk of "love," not even Melchior's name is mentioned. Left to her own devices, Wendla has come out, quite naturally, of her childish innocence. Her fresh, wide-awake senses make her aware of a dense canopy of beauty all round her, fully separate from all social structure and its "morality." Simultaneously, there is a sense of alienation and foreboding, as if the very naturalness of her context will condemn her.

Finally, the resolution of this clash between the natural forces of youth--of truth--and the man-made, social forces of adulthood--of hypocrisy--is presented in the final, consummatory scene. At Wendla's grave, Melchior, newly escaped from the reformatory, is harangued and exhorted on the one hand by Moritz, "his head under his arm,"[19] to lift himself "high above Life," into sublimity where they can "do anything," out of reach; and on the other hand, by the Masked Man, reasonable, reminding Melchior of the insufficiency of Moritz's arguments, of Melchior's own impaired

state of thinking (he is hungry), and with gruff rejoinders to the seductive song of Moritz. Should Melchior succumb to Moritz's transcendental offer of being able to escape the false human comedy --an apt description, indeed, of Melchior's own earthly pursuits-- but at the cost of learning how to do them for himself, at the cost of his own autonomy; or should he rise to the Masked Man's challenge of "life as it is," where he must deal with the hypocrisy of adulthood, with Wendla's death, indeed, with his own death? The dispute shifts from Melchior to Moritz and the Masked Man--there are critics who believe the Masked Man to be a personification of Wedekind himself[20]--that is, between a ghost and an unknown entity. This surrealistic quality blends well with the distortions already seen in the play, while at the same time giving room for dispassionate --disembodied, as it were--observation. The argument is abstracted for Melchior, giving him the first real help he has had all his life, his mother notwithstanding. In addition, there is a light and humorous pitch to the arguments of the Masked Man (rendered more glibly in the German). He quickly ridicules Moritz's hollow "idealistic" self-styling as a "smell from the grave," and realistically sizes up Melchior's immediate problem--he is cold and hungry--and prescribes a quite natural remedy: a good hot meal.

On the other hand, even this encomium for Life, the Masked Man, is not without his shadowy, sinister attributes. As mentioned, he is often likened to a Mephisto figure. He refuses, for instance, to identify himself:[21]

Melchior: It's about time you told me who you are.

Man: No. I'll make you a proposition. You trust me.
The first thing we'll do is get you out of this.

Further, Jakob Minor in his Faust commentary, points out that Mephisto is an elegantly attired gentleman:[22]

Bin ich als edler Junker hier,
In rotem, goldverbrämten Kleide,
Das Mäntelchen von starrer Seide,
Die Hahnenfeder auf dem Hut,
Mit einem langen spitzen Degen,
Und rate nun dir, kurz und gut,
Dergleichen gleichfalls anzulegen;[23]

(I am here like a fine young squire to-day,
In a suit of scarlet trimmed with gold
And a little cape of stiff brocade,
With a cock's feather in my hat
And at my side a long sharp blade,
And the most succinct advice I can give[24]
Is that you dress up just like me.)

Indeed, photographs from early productions--with Wedekind himself as the Masked Man--show him in evening attire. The Masked Man's unspecific promises--"I'll make you a proposition. You trust me." "I - will show you the world...Come with me and see everything the world has to offer,"[25]--not only parallel Mephisto's "Ich gebe dir, was noch kein Mensch gesehn," ("I will give you what no man has seen")[26] suggest, moreover, that Melchior's final conversion to "Life," because of his "need to test everything,"[27] is done not in certainty, but in doubt. Here he is like Faust, who might also have chosen suicide, but for Mephisto's offer:[28]

Ich fühl's, vergebens hab ich alle Schätze
Des Menschengeists auf mich herbeigerafft,
Und wenn ich mich am Ende niedersetze,
Quillt innerlich doch keine neue Kraft;

> Ich bin nicht um ein Haar breit höher,
> Bin dem Unendlichen nicht näher.
>
> (I feel my endeavours have not been worth a pin
> When I raked together the treasures of the human mind,
> If at the end I but sit down to find
> No new force welling up within.
> I have not a hair's breadth more of height,
> I am no nearer the Infinite.[29])

The existence of ambivalence, Shadow or evil, thus, is not at issue. Wedekind clearly accepts them as part of life qua life. What is at issue is society's attitude toward (juvenile, natural) behaviour, viz., but for society's label of such behaviour as "immoral," there would be no tragic consequence. The real immorality lies in the secretiveness, shame and hypocrisy with which adults shroud their own natural impulses, and the shibboleths of truth, honour and idealism with which they socialize their young. Melchior has learned them to be mere labels, but Moritz falls victim to their conditioning force. Melchior knows, for instance, that what transpired between himself and Wendla was neither "wrong," nor "love," as readily as Wendla knows this for herself in her remarkable "confessional."[30] Similarly, the Masked Man implies that, had Moritz yielded to Ilse's seduction--making Ilse indeed yet another Mephistotelian emanation--he might well have learned something crucial about life that would have prevented his denying it:[31]

> So you don't remember me. You had your choice, too,
> in your last few moments.

It follows that the "morality" to be inferred is the receptive,

daring and spontaneous acceptance of life as given, undistorted by misplaced trust.

Rising Symbolism

This willingness on Wedekind's part to convey his Naturalist themes, using Romantic devices, moves the play closer to Symbolism.[32] Already alluded to (pp. 38-39) was the argument that Wedekind transcended the boundaries of Naturalist doctrine in a number of ways. Even the title page of the play's 1891 edition shows, as symbolic of fated youth, a pale, distant sky, a broad meadow bound by a string of hills, in the foreground the bold shafts of two budding trees, proudly erupting flowers and soaring birds: nature in the birth of Spring, but in pale, almost fallow colours, premonitions of fatedness, like thunder at a picnic. Indeed, the very title and sub-title--Frühlings Erwachen and Eine Kindertragödie (Spring Awakening and A Children's Tragedy)--bespeak the unnatural coexistence of youth and death.

There is also the use of soliloquy, as the tragic characters Wendla and Moritz use, in which the focus is not to "report" on explicit phenomena, but to allow insight into the freely associating, randomly reflecting, rational and irrational mental processes. The best example is Wendla's "confessional" scene (II,vi). The purpose is more to give mood to a scene than to carry the plot forward. More will be said on this topic below.

The main plot, indeed, is embedded in a series of episodic

dialogues that reveal more the naiveté and confused emotions of the young people than the story's development. There is a mélange of moods: "old-wives" chatter among the girls (I,iii); pseudodebates of idealism and materialism (I,ii; I,iv; I,i); desperate rationalizations, some of which we will be examining as impaired Gestalts (I,ii and I,vii--the suicide); and boyish homosexual contact (III,vi). Moreover, the scenes are not Naturalistically detailed--we have seen Büchner's style influencing Wedekind--their form being truncated and their content of almost visionary distortion.

Contrasted with these dark images of foredoomed youth are the Expressionist, flat caricatures of vituperative teachers, intimidated mothers and inhumane, vengeful fathers. The close contiguity between the pathos of the victims and the grotesque of power, again, is reminiscent of Büchner and additionally, Lenz (as in Der Hofmeister, 1774) and Grabbe (as in Die Herrmannsschlacht, posth. 1838). The evolutionary consequence of these sharply etched "types" and clashing anti-theses was the Expressionist theatre of Beckett, Kaiser and Pirandello: though a substratum of realism remains, a superstructure of surrealism arises, and strict verisimilitude breaks down.

Mainly, however, the tactic of distorting societal attitudes in the absurd and caricatured adult figures is Wedekind's primary breach with Naturalism. En bloc, there are the pedagogues' names, symbolic of single-minded cretinism:[33] Sonnenstich, the director of the school--literally, "sunstroke," suggesting someone not fully accountable for his actions; Knüppeldick--literally, "stick-thick,"

meaning someone who beats his pupils; Hungergurt--literally, "starving belt," suggesting an anorexic self-denial; Zungenschlag, a paralyzed tongue, who stutters; Fliegetod, suggesting a fly-killer; Knochenbruch --"broken bones"; and Affenschmalz, "grease monkey" (not to be understood as the colloquial "mechanic").

That these characters should bear labels identifying them with their personalities has four (non-Naturalist) dramatic effects. First, the labels serve to isolate them from their charges, the children, and delineates the hopeless task that these children have to learn anything meaningful from the lessons prepared by these teachers.

Second, in their overt symbolism, the labels become a covert challenge to a purely Naturalistic rendition of the same characters. Such a rendition would require an empirically verifiable model of behaviour of pre-democratic German pedagogy. This requirement could readily side-track the unfolding of dramatic events, diverting attention from the main characters and perhaps (dangerously) engaging the audience's sympathy. Instead, they remain two-dimensional, distand and brief.

Third, the comic element in their names serves the same quick guffaw-raising purpose as the political cartoonist's pen-stroke hyperbole. A politician's bulbous nose or flap-jack ears are the lightning rods of the cartoonist's pointe. Similarly, by teasing apart and blatantly labelling these teachers' worst characteristic, everyone in the audience who had ever attended school--and who

hadn't--could instantly isolate the comically pathetic incompetence that the characters revealed.

Finally, the comic effect functions as relief. This in turn reveals rare moments of recognition of the tragic consequences from the hardships plaguing the children. Sandwiched between Moritz's suicide and his funeral, for instance, is the desperately funny scene in which Melchior is "interviewed" by his teachers about his alleged essay on sex discovered among the deceased Moritz's belongings. The mockery of this hearing deepens the sense of stupidly ineffective arrogance with which these teachers interact with each other. It is suggested that a window be opened to allow some "atmosphere from the outside" to counteract the "catacomb air" within the room. But the teachers cannot agree, indulging themselves in some verbal vitriol, and the window remains closed--no fresh air is to enter, no change is to occur. The unconscious irony is deepened by an order to brick up the only remaining window during the summer months. Simultaneously, Wedekind has effectively libelled the prison-house mentality of contemporary pedagogues, denying them a moral right to act as teachers, and thereby effectively sealing the hapless Melchior's career as a pupil: he ends in a reformatory.[34]

Moritz as Gestalt

As stated above, the more narrow Gestalt mechanism of impaired perception that results in Moritz's demise occurs at the contact

boundary between figure and field. Between the self and the Umwelt there is an impairment--the perceptual fallacy--such that distorted perceptions of reality occur. Compounded by the survivors' "invitation" so to function, there results the deadly relationship.

Introjection, the first of the perceptual fallacies, has been defined as an uncritical ingestion of whole, undifferentiated externals. By virtue of their powerlessness as children, aggravated by the chicanery of the officials in their lives, the characters in Spring Awakening are particularly susceptible to this form of Gestalt impairment. (Common examples are political reactionism, dogmatism, xenophobia, or the uncritical "swallowing" and retention of the norms of one's peer group.) Political propaganda and commercially inspired advertisements are an every-day encounter with persuasion tactics designed to suspend our critical faculties and turn us into mindless consumers of ideas, goods and services. Though designed to subtle and refined models, most such efforts rest on crude premises--such as fear and need--and virtually every message can be distilled to these basic motivators.

Without reverting to cynicism, one might view childhood conditioning in the same way: create fear and need in the child, and we render a contrary, wilful and self-serving child into one which is pliant, obedient and other-oriented. That these latter traits are of unquestioned utility in any social milieu is not at issue--there are, for example, no "revolutionary" characters in Spring Awakening--rather, what must be examined is the quality of

the message reception, the manner in which it is deployed. The Masked Man speaks of a (necessary) moral code as being a product of two imaginary forces--duty and free will--that puts the onus squarely on the individual who, with free, will, remembering his dignity, must do his duty:[35]

> There's something in what he says, our ghost friend. We must always remember our dignity. So, what I think of a moral code is that it's an actual product of two imaginary forces--Duty and free will. Their product we call moral, and we can't deny it exists all right.

Moritz's fear of the duties that were imposed on him have caused him to ingest them wholesale, smothering his free will. Martyr-like, he believes suffering to absolve one's guilt. ("I think it must be so much sweeter to suffer than to inflict. And to be overcome--suffering--innocent yourself--isn't that the height of all happiness?")[36] When he desires to be informed about sexual matters, he symbolically requests Melchior to hide the essay containing the information among his school things--he cannot bear a free expression of his will.

Furthermore, he is so filled with the importance of self--as he sees himself--that he has no critical abilities to see himself as others see him. Nothing of the <u>real</u> self is being experienced. "I followed the text," he says, "but it worked the wrong way."[37] He swallowed the text whole--he became the text--but it could not work without "free will," and he ends up deceiving himself.

Moritz has been uncritically giving himself to introjection for some time, preferring the printed page for information rather

than observing nature, as Melchior did. When he does observe nature, it is to watch chickens lay eggs--a somewhat distant model for human reproduction:[38]

> How d'you expect me to know? All right, chickens lay eggs, and I was once told Mother carried me near her heart. And I can remember being five and looking the other way when someone turned up that queen of hearts with the low neckline. I don't have to do that any more--but nowadays I can hardly speak to a girl without feeling as if I'm loathsome--and I don't know why...

The self-consciousness he felt at age five has now mushroomed into a full-blown introjection of shame at the most natural of adolescent fantasies. In addition, he keeps a diary; and prefers reading over direct observation, but his readings have distorted his image of girls to conform to the melodramatic fantasies of the age.[39] Moreover, reading has kept his mind closed to contradictions. He reads selectively, to reinforce his prejudices, and can thus rationalize dissonant facts more readily when they are silently presented:[40]

> I looked through the whole of Meyer's shorter encyclopaedia. Nothing but a lot of words, they don't tell you a thing. Just--shame. What's the use of an encyclopaedia that doesn't answer the real questions?

Of course Moritz has not posed the "real question," because he is not able to formulate it, and the encyclopaedia cannot answer. The result is the form of egocentric consciousness that will not permit consciousness of the field: "My parents could have had any one of a hundred children, and they got me,"[41] he says rhetorically, with a false sense of bravura, when he can do nothing about it.

Moritz is a harsh self-critic, a socially valued characteristic

that purports to allow better understanding of one's actions and to do better next time. He has "swallowed" this rubric whole, for he fails to recognize the thin line between sensible and unreasonable self-criticism, being often more unreasonable than not. A person who is critical of his own language abilities may reasonably decide, for instance, that he is poor at Greek and ought to avoid the course. Moritz, instead, would use all possible time available for study, even his walks![42] He conjugates Greek verbs until he gets sick: "My God,[43] conjugating at breakfast and all the way to school til everything looked green! "[44] Indeed, Moritz is almost masochistic in his professed ambition to succeed: "If I can go on like this...I'll work and work till my brain starts bursting through my eyes."[45]

Moritz experiences condemnation, degradation and humiliation as though they had originated in someone else. Given the distress generated by his extreme self-criticism--for clearly there is no pleasure in believing oneself to be incompetent--it is no surprise that he is unable to attribute his pain to his own choices and actions. This kind of perceptual error is called projection: placing into the Umwelt those personality traits which are unacceptable to oneself. Thinking through such choices and actions would require a switch of perspective, of reversing the projection, as it were, and taking responsibility for one's behaviour. Moritz cannot do this, and is given to avoidance, like his rationalization for anticipated failure:[46]

I'd like to know what exams are for. So they can fail

> us. Seven of us have got to fail anyway, the next classroom only holds sixty.

Nor will he admit to feelings of shame as being his own:[47]

> ...d'you think the feeling of shame...d'you think it's because of [our] upbringing?

And whereas Melchior has informed himself about sexual matters from books, illustrations and direct observation of "nature," Moritz's fearfulness--such fear that the only nude girl he has ever seen has been a corpse in an anatomy museum[48]--has kept him quite ignorant.[49]

Seen perceptually, then, Moritz is projecting his own fear of sexual matters onto the Umwelt instead of admitting his natural curiosity and accepting it. By the time of the second act, after the holidays, after having read Melchior's essay, Moritz is no wiser. Quite the opposite, his projective abilities are even more developed, taking on forms of divine punishment: "...when I fail my father would have a stroke, and my mother a breakdown;"[50] or febrile fantasies of disorientation:[51]

> Before that exam I prayed to God--let this cup pass from me...But it's still there, that cup. I can still see the glow from its halo threatening me.
> ...
> I'm trembling. Everything seems so strange...I can feel the air pressing on my skin...I can see round the other side of things...I can hear every leaf moving... How your garden stretches out in the moolight--it's so quiet...There are figures moving about down there --out from the bushes and in again.

Moritz is close to the final perceptual fallacy--retrojection --wherein he begins to turn messages going out into the Umwelt in on himself, possessed by unwanted images:[52]

> The leaves are whispering. It's like my grandmother come back--telling me the story of the headless queen... beautiful as the sun...More beautiful than any other maiden in the land. Only she had no head, she'd been born without a head. She she couldn't eat, or drink, couldn't see, couldn't laugh--also she couldn't kiss. She ruled at court with her hands--supple movements of her soft white fingers. And her brisk little feet tapped out death sentences and declarations of war. One day she was defeated by a rival king--who happened to have two heads. These two heads were always getting in each other's way and quarreling, quarrelling, with a flood of words and each head's flood of words trying to drown the other head's flood--till every word was drowned. So the Chief Magician took the smaller head and put it on the queen--and behold--it went well on her. So the king married the queen, and the heads no longer got in each other's way but were always kissing each other--on the forehead and the cheeks and the lips and for years and years they lived happily ever after... What a lot of nonsense. Since the holidays I just can't get that headless queen out of my mind. If I see a nice-looking girl, there she is headless--and then suddenly I haven't got a head. Well, I suppose there'll be someone to put one back on me.

The narcissistic urges of youth, instead of being onanistically reified--as seen in the reform school scene--have here become a haunting image of trapped and irreversible self-love. Similarly, when the boys read Faust in the same scene, we see that they are discussing the Walpurgisnacht scene, a perverse and orgiastic revel in which grotesque images abound: Faust, too, is engaged in self-gratification.

When Moritz has run full cycle and is on the point of killing himself, there is a numbing illustration of the alienating and destructive powers of the impaired manner in which he has been perceiving the world. Moritz encounters Ilse. If, as the Masked Man implies in the graveyard scene, Ilse is an emanation of Mephisto,

then she will serve nicely to bring the "invitational" component of the suicidal Gestalt into discussion.

The Invitation

We have argued above (p. 12 ff) that the suicidal act would not occur but for an "invitation" on the part of the survivors. Ilse is such a survivor, par excellence. Her support group is a motley, loosely communal collection of artists known as the Orgi-asmans. These mysterious and inchoate characters--we hear of them only through Ilse--provide a haven for the reckless girl. Had Moritz so wanted, he could presumably have attached himself to their demi-monde. Indeed, Ilse invites him "as far as [her] parents' house."[53] But it is an offer impossible to accept, for she immediately re-forms it as a condescension: "I'll curl your hair and hang a little bell around your neck. Or we've got a rocking-horse you could play with."[54] Ilse has unconsciously assessed Moritz's immature and dependent status in the world. Moritz is a matter of indifference to her.

She goes a step farther--does she divine Moritz's purpose? --by speaking of suicide and mayhem:[55]

> ...And always raving on about death, shooting, suicide, gas-ovens--one morning he had a pistol in bed, loaded--poked it on my nipple--"one twitch and you're dead." He'd have done it, Moritz, he'd have done it.

This speech is a projection of her own weak hold on life. Her last words to Moritz are: "Sweet dreams. D'you still go down to the

Wigwam--where Melchi Gábor buried my tomahawk?--Brr. By the time you wake up I'll be rotting in the dustbin."[56] The expression "wake up" is used metaphorically by Ilse--"Bis es an euch kommt" in the German--and can be seen as an ironic twist on her previous word "tomahawk"--a scalping and beheading weapon--with which Moritz may have his headless queen. We also know--but Ilse cannot--that Moritz has been thinking about escaping to America, where such a weapon was in customary use among the Indians.

Ilse, like Moritz, projects her flaws and blames others. In this scene, she projects her distaste of the Orgasmians' excesses, while nevertheless living among them. Ambivalent in her role as artist's model, she projects an image of Mother of God while behaving sluttishly.[57] And she projects her ambivalence toward suicide by talking about Heinrich, who aborts his threatened suicide,[58] and not unlike an oracle, she provides Moritz with a metaphorical purpose. A direct projection--i.e., a model of a consummated suicide --would be resisted by Moritz since it would purge him, through identification with the perpetrator, of the intent to commit the act. Thus, an aborted, incomplete image borne by her hyperbolic outburst has the opposite effect: it strengthens his determination to complete the task as we see in the vehemence of his final outburst.[59]

Ilse's self-serving banality functions as an invitation to Moritz. By feeding him images of destruction, sensual excess and cowardly behaviour, she reflects to him the impaired perceptions he retains of his life. In addition, she is provocatively narcissistic.

Combined, these messages become a retroflection and he ends by internalizing them. He not only desires Ilse sexually--he wants to be Ilse.[60] And if Ilse is, indeed, a Mephistotelian image, there remains only one thing for him to do.

No less dangerous--if more subtle--is the relationship of the two friends Moritz and Melchior. To all purposes, Melchior is concerned about the emotional and intellectual welfare of his friend. Certainly he is the imago of a young adult: a spontaneous, bright, enterprising yet receptive fellow, with--alone among the children--a sensitive and well-intentioned mother who encourages the boy's intellectual pursuits. Can this boy mean harm?

Indeed he cannot. Nevertheless, his daring nature, fully engaged in struggle against a bigoted, bourgeois mentality, causes ruin for his less endowed friends, Wendla and Moritz. But for the tragic demise of his friends, Melchior would not be able to risk the challenge of the Masked Man, and walk arm in arm with him into Life. Wendla, the soft, trusting girl of every boy's dreams founders, almost immediately, on the rocks of her mother's dread and of her own blinded sexuality. We see Melchior indulging himself, quite naturally, in a mutual seduction with her.

Moritz, arguably no more competent than a "girl,"[61] is more profoundly enmeshed with Melchior. And despite their baldly stupid characterizations, the pedagogues Breakneck and Total Loss are not incorrect in their following discovery:[62]

Breakneck. It is something of a mystery to me, my dear

> colleague, what it is that draws my best pupil and my worst pupil together.
>
> Total Loss. As it is to me, my dear colleague.

Moritz, Wendla--and, to a lesser degree, Frau Gabor--thus become the mechanism by which Melchior tests the dangerous course of social reality. Psychologically they form an equilibrium by which he maintains his inner direction. That they are unwillingly "victimized"--indeed, that it is necessary for them to be victimized, given the circumstances--makes the relationship no less inequitable. In terms of Moritz, this inequity takes the form of the "Invitation" to suicide.

For purposes of this discussion, and carrying the argument above (p. 15) forward, the following is an outline of a truly helpful response to a suicide's plight--what in the clinical literature is referred to as "crisis intervention." The final precipitate from the wash of clinical and theoretical commentary is predominantly phenomenological. A "helpful" response is, by definition, one in which the helper disinterestedly suspends personal expectations and ulterior motives (not unlike Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief"); relies unanalytically and quite passively on "intuitive" signals from his pre-verbal resources (a paradox in itself, in that one cannot "will" passivity); and is ready to share intentionality, to be conscious of not just the other's consciousness, but one's own, concurrently. Such a response looks out, as it were, on the same horizon, and does not lead or call another from beyond that horizon into presumed safety. The total experience

is not unlike Aquinas' aesthetic quidditas ("whatness"):[63] the consummatory flash of awareness that comes with a merging of the viewer-subject and artistic object, an awareness of the total experience as being greater than the sum of its parts--a Gestalt.

Ilse, clearly, is no such perceiver. Her conversation with Moritz is as we have seen, projective, blaming, and quite egocentric. Indeed, she is a model seductress, for she uses the phenomenological constructs perversely. Instead of suspending her "disbelief," she brings it to bear. Her opening remark is: "Have you lost something?"[64] Moritz's boast about having spent the night with a bar maid--a brave enterprise for a boy about whose neck she would hang a bell--is flattteringly reinforced with the lie: "That's what you look like."[65] Further, she is the very opposite of intuitive. Her egocentricity and full-course narcissism prevent this. Moritz's solitary, alarmed person, his obsessive questions about Heinrich's death--these are lost on Ilse as signals. Indeed, she perverts the intentionality of purpose. Couching her invitation to Moritz to accompany her in the ambivalent terms already referred to, she remains distant and ensures his decline of her offer. The time and place they share physically is not followed by intentional commonality. Ilse continues to approach him from the outside.

Even the kind-hearted Frau Gabor fails to "be there" for the hapless Moritz. Rather than respond to his written (!) threat of suicide, she reports to him that it "estranged" her ("hat mich.. befremdet")--and then proceeds to parrot the same rationalizing

disapprovals that were so caricatured at his graveside:[66]

> In your letter you seemed to be suggesting that if your flight should prove impossible you might be moved to put your own life in danger--a threat which I found, to be quite frank with you, Moritz, somewhat surprising. However undeserving a misfortune might be, one must surely absolutely never allow oneself to contemplate proscribed remedies. And that you should seek, in this fashion, to pass to me the responsibility for such a grievous sin has something to it that in the eyes of someone less well-disposed than myself might all too easily be interpreted as an attempt at...improper pressure. I must confess that from you, who otherwise have always seemed so clearly to appreciate wherein lies a man's duty to himself, this is the last thing that I would have expected. And I do remain firmly convinced that you were still suffering too deeply from the first shock of your disappointment to be fully conscious of the effect of your words.

By declaring Moritz to be unaccountable, she evades the challenge of dealing with him. To suggest that Moritz could clearly appreciate his duty is seriously to misapprehend him. Here, as in the Faust-reading scene[67] Frau Gabor is only too happy to withdraw behind a façade of posturing.

Finally, even Melchior falls into this pattern. By the first scene of the second act, Moritz has been fairly established as a youngster of only mediocre talents, overly nervous, barely coping. He has just disclosed to his best friend, Melchior, that he is "aufgeregt" (nervously anxious); that he crams desperately until dawn; that he is depressed. A phenomenological response to such a clearly declining fortune might be: "Is all that studying doing you any good?" Or: "You look terrrible. Are you getting enough sleep?" Or: "Tell me one thing that I can do for you." Each of these responses would have been specifically for Moritz, and would have joined the

two friends in a closer bond. Instead, Melchior asks, "Shall I roll you a cigarette?" His friend responds, "Thank you, I don't smoke." (Danke, ich rauche nicht.) One might reasonably ask how it could have escaped Melchior's attention that his best friend did not smoke.

This inattentiveness continues throughout the scene. Moritz, continuing his (embarrassing) self-disclosures, is met by generalities. Examining Melchior's responses through the scene, we see:[68]

1. "May I roll you a cigarette?"
2. "Life is an unexpected meanness. I wouldn't be undisposed toward hanging myself among the branches..."
3. (To Moritz's suggestion to leave): "Let's wait til we've drunk the tea."

There is little to suggest an empathic response here, a conjoining of intentions. There is, for example no recognition of Moritz's sentimental desire to escape to the lure of the garden. Moreover, when Frau Gabor enters with the tea, Melchior recounts the tragic story of the enervated Max--done in by a bestial school system--for whom there was little requiem. Surely it was an ill-chosen moment to add the rider of Rector Sunstroke's bit of chicanery to Moritz's stresses.

To be sure, Melchior's responses seem to be, <u>prima facie</u>, agreeable. But they lose their benign appearance when we see that they are not so much agreements with Moritz as with Melchior's own philosophy. They are holding patterns which are brought together in a final rejection of Moritz's passive and fanciful view of male sexual gratification:[69]

> Moritz. ..The satisfaction that the man gets out of it --I think it must be flat and shallow...
>
> Melchior. You can think what you like--but keep it to yourself. I don't want to think about it.

In sum, Melchior can be seen as a "rescuer." Again, this seems like odd criticism, but a rescuer is really more self- than other-oriented. Rescuers relieve others of their responsibility of coming to terms with, and working out solutions for, their dilemmas. Conversely, letting another person "stew in his own juice," far from being the cruelty it first appears to be, is a valuable encomium for a person who has lost him competence and confidence. It basically signals to him: "I trust you enough to transform this problem into an opportunity." The rescuer does the opposite. He basically is saying: "I have what it takes to rescue you, not you. Look to me for help." Melchior, the rescuer, agrees to beat Wendla in a momentary fit of sadistic passion, where his needs brutally supplant hers.[70] Similarly, he is prepared to write essays for Moritz, complete with realistically appearing mistakes.[71] Clearly, this helps Melchior more than Moritz.

And it backfires, we see, with the fateful essay. Melchior agrees to Moritz's "girlish" request to slip an essay on human sexuality among his books, so that he, Moritz, might be forced to read it, as though it were homework.[72] By agreeing to this "interesting piece of work," Melchior reinforces Moritz's bashfulness about sexuality; his avoidance of challenge; his aimless and random work habits; and finally, his impaired perception of himself that

he can survive. There is subtle distancing in Melchior's focussing on the "work," and not the desperate friend.

This, then, constitutes the invitation: Melchior "uses" his friends on his own developmental journey--the more he distances himself from them, the more sure he becomes of his ability to survive. Conversely, given Moritz's fragile disposition, his hold on life becomes untenable: his qualitative response to Melchior's non-phenomenological presence is to begin thinking about escape to America and/or suicide.

Miss Julie

Miss Julie (Fröken Julie), a one-act "naturalistic tragedy" --so its sub-title--was first produced in Copenhagen in March, 1889. Based on a newspaper story about a noble-woman who succumbed to the advances of a servant, Strindberg wrote the play in fourteen days. The scene is the kitchen of a country estate on Midsummer Night. Julie, the only daughter of a Count, uses the opportunity provided by her father's absence to approach Jean, servant of the household. Requesting his services as a dance partner, she behaves intermittently seductively and arrogantly. Though feeling flattered by her attentions, Jean is concerned about the reactions of the other servants of the estate, particularly their gossip and the consequential anger of his master. Despite his warnings, the young mistress becomes increasingly intemperate and awakens, with her challenging and seductive comments, Jean's desires. In order not

to be seen tête à tête by a group of approaching partyers composed of servants, the two slip into the only hideaway available, Jean's room. There Julie surrenders herself to him.

Now the roles become reversed. Jean quickly abandons his subservient attitude, and becomes the master; and Julie is now debased because, to Jean, she has fallen unpardonably low. Slowly she begins to recognize the enormity of her transgression. The two lovers share no interests or concerns. Her complaints are met by derision and insult. Urging her to take the necessary money from her father's desk, Jean convinces her to run away with him. But when the Count unexpectedly returns home and rings for Jean, he reassumes his servant's identity. The only alternative for the shattered Julie is suicide. In a trance, and unable to resist, she accepts the proferred razor in Jean's hand and exits.

One of the most important documents of influence in Naturalist drama was Strindberg's Foreword to Miss Julie.[73] Here Strindberg outlines his motives and themes for writing the play. Occasionally an anti-feminist polemic, the writing pointedly attacks the dramaturgie of the day, particularly its habit of forcing the audience to make ethical judgments about issues raised on stage. Miss Julie was to be a play without any moral predisposition. It was to present the theme of "social climbing or falling, of higher or lower, better or worse, of man and woman" in such a way that "those inferior, unreliable instruments of thought called feelings, which become harmful and superfluous as reasoning develops," would be precluded.

Any sympathy for the heroine was "solely due to weakness." Though it was "tragic to see one favoured by fortune to go under," the objective rendering of life was to illustrate the irrelevance of questioning right or wrong. "Life is not so mathematically idiotic," he writes, "as to permit only the big to eat the small; it happens just as often that the bee kills the lion or at least drives him mad." To that end, the play's point of view was not to be one-sided:

> What will offend simple minds is that my plot is not simple, nor its point of view single. In real life an action--this, by the way, is a somewhat new discovery --is generally caused by a whole series of motives, more or less fundamental, but as a rule the spectator chooses just one of these...A suicide is committed. Business troubles, says the man of affairs. Unrequited love, say the women. Sickness, says the invalid. Despair, says the down-and-out. But it is possible that the motive lay in all or none of these directions..

Nor were the characters to be "fixed and finished." Dissatisfied with the bourgeois "conception of the immobility of the soul," he ordered a "challenge by the Naturalists who know the richness of the soul complex and realize that vice has a reverse side very much like virtue" and presented his "figures vacillating, disintegrated, a blend of old and new." Here Strindberg was more Naturalistic than Wedekind. There are no characters who function as stereotypical redoubts, against whom he can bounce his principal characters. Even the cook, for instance, as a minor figure, can neatly accommodate the dissonant behaviour of piety and theft; and the Count, though absent, is nevertheless important to the development of the play by the way his child-rearing practices are exposed as one of Julie's "motives."

Further Naturalist doctrine is seen in Strindberg's speech forms, as was argued above (pp. 35-36). With regard to speech content, moreover, Strindberg makes obvious use of the Naturalist observation that discourse between people is highly random, often circular and irrational, reflecting less its explicit manifestation than its implict intent.

Notwithstanding, he introduces several non-Naturalist elements--such as the diversions of pantomine and music, dream sequences and conscious rhetoric--to attempt barometric inferences of inner states of being. He is not as liberal in this regard as Wedekind, whose use of soliloquy and carefully balanced discourse (often in poetic language) distributes the action into dramatic bulkheads that buoy the play's momentum. Our understanding of the play's content is heightened in this way. Wendla's tragic end, for example, is signalled by a brief and lyrical soliloquy (II,vi). Further, we sense Moritz's doom from the first time he appears by his evasive, hyperbolic and sentimental comments (I,i). These characters thus take on a more "finished" appearance than Strindberg's, who by contrast, could feasibly have interchanged the identities of Julie and Jean, given the same environmental realities and biological antagonisms.

In both plays thus, there is a pulse of life, with its inconsistencies and contradicitons. But where accessibility to Life is available only to those of Wedekind's characters who dare to risk transgressing its very reality, to Strindberg it becomes

an unmediated reality which ultimately offers no escape.

Finally, the characters and behaviour of Miss Julie and Jean are based on the Naturalistic themes of inheritance and environment and, additionally for Jean, economic necessity. First there is the flawed character of her mother transmitted to Julie by the male-phobic conditioning she received as a child:[74]

> ...My mother wasn't well-born; she came of quite humble people, and was brought up with all those new ideas of sex equality and women's rights, and so on. She thought marriage was quite wrong. So when my father proposed to her, she said she would never become his wife...but in the end she did. I came into the world, as far as I can make out, against my mother's will, and I was left to run wild, but I had to do all the things a boy does...to prove women are as good as men. I had to wear boys' clothes; I was taught to handle horses...and I wan't allowed in the dairy. She made me groom and harness and go out hunting; I even had to try to plough. All the men on the estate were given the women's jobs, and the women the men's, until the whole place went to rack and ruin...My mother got ill...I don't know what was the matter with her, but she used to have strange attacks and hide herself in the attic or garden.

Illustrated here is also the "weak, degenerated mind" she has inherited as a descendant of a declining stock,[75] and the way it influenced her relationship with her fiancé. Finally there were the combined lures of her father's absence, and the aphrodisiac effects of Midsummer Night festivities.

Julie's survivor, Jean, is a self-educated, brash, indifferent yet very mobile servant, with highly manoeverable instincts and perceptual skills that he brings ably to bear on the shifting mindscape the antagonists traverse. Thick-skinned enough

to use others, he is nevertheless afraid of his peers, for their alleged readiness to destroy him in his unseeming upward grasping. His fear is expressed in contempt for them:[76]

> Julie. I know our people and I love them, just as they do me. Let them come. You'll see.
>
> Jean. No, Miss Julie, they don't love you. They take your food, then spit at it. You must believe me. Listen to them, just listen to what they're singing.... No, don't listen.
>
> Julie (listening). What are they singing?
>
> Jean. They're mocking...you and me.
>
> Julie. Oh no! How horrible! What cowards!
>
> Jean. A pack like that's always cowardly. But against such odds there's nothing we can do but run away.

Jean's instinctive perceptual skills make him, given the shifting context of the relationship, at times a psychological terrorist:[77]

> Menial's whore, lackey's harlot, shut your mouth and get out of here! Are you the one to lecture me for being coarse? Nobody of my kind would ever be as coarse as you were tonight. Do you think any servant girl would throw herself at a man that way? Have you ever seen a girl of my class asking for it like that? I haven't. Only animals and prostitutes.

--or at times a shameless flatterer:[78]

> Mistress of the house, ornament of the firm. With your looks, and your style...oh, it's bound to be a success! Terrific! You'll sit like a queen in the office and set your slaves in motion by pressing an electric button. The guests will file past your throne and nervously lay their treasure on your table. You've no idea the way people tremble when they get their bills. I'll salt the bills and you'll sugar them with your sweetest smiles...

--able to put on airs:[79]

> ...I've been gone on quite a few girls. And once I went sick because I couldn't have the one I wanted. Sick, I mean, like those princes in the Arabian Nights who couldn't eat or drink for love.

--or solicit sympathy:[80]

> ...I lived in a laborer's hovel with seven other children and a pig, out in the gray fields where there isn't a single tree. But from the window I could see the wall round the Count's park with apple trees above it. That was the Garden of Eden, guarded by many terrible angels with flaming swords. All the same, I and the other boys managed to get to the tree of life. Does all this make you despise me?

--act the underdog:[81]

> I'm too modest to believe you would pay real compliments to a man like me, so I must take it you are exaggerating...that this is what's known as flattery.

--or provide leadership:[82]

> Julie. What do I care about all that? I'm putting those things behind me. Tell me you love, because if you don't...if you don't what am I?
>
> Jean. I'll tell you a thousand times over...later. But not here. No sentimentality now or everything will be lost. We must consider this thing calmly like reasonable people. (Takes a cigar, cuts and lights it.) You sit down there and I'll sit here and we'll talk as if nothing has happened.

--and all with a deft sense of timing and style that reduce the butterfly struggles of Julie to stillness.

Strindberg, however, does not completely fill the orthodox Naturalist specifications for drama. The introduction of ballet, pantomine and musical interludes--though he defends them as "fully justified" on a Midsummer Night's eve[83]--nevertheless permit a degree of creative latitude on the part of the actors, focussing away from

direct observation of life, onto making explicit what is implicit, objectifying the subjective. Thus the actors move away from the strict mimesis of life as it is, and help in creating, in Strindberg's phrase, "atmosphere and illusion."[84]

An even deeper foray into more expressive dramatization is Strindberg's use of dreams. Before Freud's "royal road to the unconscious,"[85] dreams had largely been used as narrative frames in literature--often bearing prophecies or allegories, i.e., logical extensions or reflections of their narratives--but never in the manner prescribed by psychological speculation: that they are "necessary adjuncts" to our emotional well-being, as related to our fears, guilts, repressions, etc., by providing unconscious symmetry to our lives, in an associative, random and uncontrolled play of images, each feeding into the other in a Gestalt-like whole.[86] That Miss Julie's symmetrical and artificially worded confrontation of dreams with Jean suggests more art than life does not detract from the "barometric" purpose of these speeches as psychological indicators of inner states of being, indirectly expressed, an attempt to render the unconscious recognizeable:[87]

> Julie. ...For that matter, everything is strange. Life, human beings, everything, just scum drifting about on the water until it sinks...down and down. That reminds me of a dream I sometimes have, in which I'm on top of a pillar and can't see any way of getting down. When I look down I'm dizzy; I have to get down, but I haven't the courage to jump. I can't stay there and I long to fall, but I don't fall. There's no respite. There can't be any peace at all for me until I'm down, right down on the ground. And if I did get to the ground, I'd want to be under the ground..Have you ever felt like that?

> Jean. No. In my dream I'm lying under a great tree in a wood. I want to get up, up to the top of it, and look out over the bright landscape where the sun is shining and rob that high nest of its golden eggs. And I climb and climb, but the trunk is so thick and smooth and it's so far to the first branch. But I know if I can once reach that first branch, I'll go to the top just as if I'm on a ladder. I haven't reached it yet, but I shall get there, if only in my dreams.

Here he is at greatest variance with Zola's dictum that his "characters..might not play but rather live, before the audience."[88] Jean's "answering" dream is clearly expressive of a powerful and frustrated ambition, which he only symbolically acknowledges. In addition, Strindberg has forced the play into one act, together with monologue, mime and ballet, in order that the audience might not "escape from the illusion."[89] Clearly he has recognized that drama is, after all, not "living," but performing life, and is seeking to rectify the very unnaturalness of staging an imitation of life that would deny its artificiality. It is no offence to our "suspended disbelief," therefore, to encounter the symbolic images of ascension of the menial and collapse of noblesse that is embodied in the gratuitously blended dreams. Nor do we question the deus ex machina quality of the (un-)timely return of the Count. The coincidence of these events gives the play a symbolic suggestion much like the arrival of the Masked Man hints at Romantic creativity on Wedekind's part.

Above all, Strindberg's personal phobia against women is ventilated in this play. Here he is contradicting his own dramatic legislation for objectivity. On the one hand he argues for the

"richness of the soul complex" resulting in "vacillating..conglomerations of characters, yet when describing Miss Julie as "modern," Strindberg broadens his focus to include her as a stereotype--the "half-woman man-hater"[90]--whose responses to Jean are by no means unique, but follow a preordained pattern:[91]

> But Miss Julie is also a relic of the old warrior nobility now giving way to the new nobility of nerve and brain. She is a victim of the discord which a mother's "crime" has produced in a family, a victim, too, of the day's complaisance, of circumstances, of her own defective constitution, all of which are equivalent to the Fate or Universal Law of former days.

This willingness to posit a Universal structure behind reality, rather than remaining "scientific,"--there is nothing "noble," for instance, in "nerve and brain,"--makes Strindberg's characters significantly more "fixed and finished" than he would have liked. Unlike Wedekind, who champions life qua life--and embodies the recognition of that tenet in the Masked Man and the struggling for it in Melchior--there are no such truth-bearers in Miss Julie. If Jean wins against Julie, it is the win of a buzzard picking the flesh from a woman dying of spiritual thirst. If he shows determination and cleverness, it is a criminal challenge to a crumbling social structure. Jean wants no change--he wants to buy into the system. Inevitable as change and reversal of the train of history are, we are appalled at the rapaciousness of the engine. Jean is, simply, what we now call a psychopath, unhampered by conscience. By contrast, Melchior, by admitting his weakness toward Moritz, his "use" of Wendla and his need to question everything,

is ready to leave the old and progress toward the new along a brilliantly conscious path.

These biases give ready support to a Gestalt view of interaction. Julie, by definition, is "impaired": circumstance and inheritance conspire against her best interests. Moreover, Jean's exploitation of her, on a superficial level, is achieved by mimicking her handicap. (We are reminded of Tise and Moritz.) Leaving aside the author's predilection for male superiority, we see that Jean's (socially) narrowed field of view has caused him to "swallow" the myth of powerful birth. On the one hand without illusion as to the nature of the upper class, he nevertheless believes himself competent to supplant the nobility. He looks, dresses and can teach himself to behave like them:[92]

> Julie. Très gentil, Monsieur Jean. Très gentil.
>
> Jean. Vous voulez plaisanter, Madame.
>
> Julie. Et vous voulez parler français. Where did you learn it?

No matter that Julie's family have behaved execrably; no matter that he would buy a Roumanian title--he remains unshaken in the bourgeois illusion that if only he were "up there," all would be well: "I haven't any ancestors at all, but I might become one."[93]

Jean also engages in Projection:[94]

> Miss Julie's too high-and-mighty in some respects, and not enough in others, just like her mother before her. The Countess was more at home in the kitchen and cow sheds than anywhere else, but would she ever go driving with only one horse? She went round with her cuffs filthy, but she had to have the coronet on the cuff

> links. Our young lady--to come back to her--hasn't any proper respect for herself or her position. I mean she isn't refined. (Emphasis added.)

Indeed, it is Jean's own fear of being perceived as unrefined which is being projected onto Julie. One further result of this sense of inferiority is his parvenu behaviour.

Like Ilse with Moritz, this perceptual fallacy becomes an ironic weapon against Julie, because it conflicts with her own projections, rendering them into dangerous retroflections:[95]

> Jean. What if I refuse this mésalliance?
>
> Julie. Mésalliance?
>
> Jean. Yes, for me. I'm better bred than you, see! Nobody in my family committed arson.
>
> Julie. How do you know?
>
> Jean. Well, you can't prove otherwise, because we haven't any family records outside the registrar's office. But I've seen your family tree in that book on the drawing-room table. Do you know who the founder of your family was? A miller who let his wife sleep with the King one night during the Danish war. I haven't any ancestors like that. I haven't any ancestors at all, but I might become one.
>
> Julie. This is what I get for confiding in someone so low, for sacrificing my family honor...
>
> Jean. Dishonor! Well, I told you so. One shouldn't drink, because then one talks. And one shouldn't talk.
>
> Julie. Oh, how ashamed I am, how bitterly ashamed! If at least you loved me!

Here Jean has deftly projected his own base motives onto the "noble" Julie, whose angry retort--"family honor"--instead of hitting its mark, is turned against her by the iconoclast Jean.

Indeed, Jean is measurably less impaired than Julie, continuing

the Gestalt metaphor, in that he does not "suffer" from Retrojection. It is this final fallacy that dooms Julie and spares Jean, who reframes the Retrojection into the "invitation" to Julie: just as the Count returns, Julie says self-consciously, "I must take the blame and bear the consequences."[96] Unable to see her own victimized state, unable to resume her powerful status, she awaits Jean's command. Jean--whom Strindberg now has tellingly "listening" to his master's voice--quickly recognizes the card that has been dealt him, and resumes his place of subservience. But Julie has cast herself "below" him retroflectively, and she literally hypnotizes herself so that she might "take the broom" and sweep herself away.[97]

Jean's bald thrust for power over Julie, psychopathically illustrated by the brutal killing of his lover's pet bird, makes his sadistic toying with Julie's feelings as natural as a terrier playing a rat. The Darwinian popularization--survival of the fittest--is Strindberg's shibboleth as we witness Jean's abetting the inevitable demise of what the author has cast as being in evolutionary decline: women and nobility. It follows that the "invitation" to Julie would be far more clear and purposeful than that expressed by Wedekind's characters--who are not so obviously pitted against each other--and Jean embodies all the murderously sinister qualities of a Borgia:[96]

> (Putting the razor in her hand.) Here is the broom. Go now, while it's light...out to the barn...and... (Whispers in her ear.)

That Jean can "reverse" his perspective is, in the Gestalt

view, what makes him a survivor vis à vis Julie. The invitation cannot be refused. Locked into the rigidity of her Gestalt, Julie is obsessed with the trappings of her class, unable to see how on the one hand, it had lost its historical validity and been reduced to form only, and on the other, how Jean was causing her dependence on him to deepen into a psychosis. Once Julie loses the authority of rank to him through her indiscretion, she must match survival skills with him. But Jean has the manipulative wit of the lower class, the arbitrary underdog, and he has developed them from childhood, securing for himself in the process a superior place among his peers.[99] Further, his intelligence of Julie's upper class pretensions is gained randomly, from a Julie desperate to win emotional intimacy after physical surrender. Thus he feels his way about his Umwelt, ever listening for danger signals, always ready to play a winning hand, never bluffed, even by himself:[100]

> Jean. Lake Como's a rainy hole and I didn't see any oranges outside the shops. But it's a good place for tourists. Plenty of villas to be rented by--er --honeymoon couples. Profitable business that. Know why? Because they all sign leases for six months and all leave after three weeks.
>
> Julie. (Naively.) After three weeks? Why?
>
> Jean. They quarrel, of course. But the rent has to be paid just the same. And then it's let again. So it goes on and on, for there's plenty of love although it doesn't last long.

Even the Count's untimely return, while causing a flurry of anxiety, does nothing to diminish his superior stature--indeed, it is heightened, since it pushes Julie even deeper, to the level of

being a slave to a servant. Jean knows his victim:[101]

> Julie (in panic.) What did he say? My God, what did he say?
>
> Jean. He ordered his boots and his coffee in half an hour.
>
> Julie. Then there's half an hour...Oh, I'm so tired! I can't do anything. Can't be sorry, can't run away, can't stay, can't live...can't die. Help me. Order me, and I'll obey like a dog. Do me this last service ...save my honour, save his name. You know what I ought to do, but haven't the strenth to do. Use your strenth and order me to do it.
>
> Jean. I don't know why...I can't now...I don't understand...It's as if this coat made me...I can't give you orders...and now that the Count has spoken to me ...I can't quite explain, but...well, that devil of a lackey is bending my back again. I believe if the Count came down now and ordered me to cut my throat I'd do it on the spot.
>
> Julie. Then pretend you're him and I'm you. You did some fine acting before, when you knelt to me and played the aristocrat. Or...have you ever seen a hypotist at the theatre? (He nods.) He says to the person: "Take the broom," and he takes it. He says: "Sweep,"and he sweeps...

Julie is so helpless by this time that she tells Jean how to destroy her--it is the ultimate retroflective posture. Beginning with a half-man identity, ready to humiliate men, in answer to her mother's vengeful demand never to "enslave" herself to any man, Julie has lost her tactical advantage to a man better adept at exploiting her weaknesses than she is able to exploit his. The result is the blind alley trap out of which she cannot even recognize her tormentor ("...the whole room has turned to smoke...and you look like a stove...a stove like a man in black with a tall hat... your eyes are glowing like coals when the fire is low...and your

face is a white patch like ashes...")[102] Like Moritz's hallucination in Spring Awakening (II,i) she is psychotically fixated in one mode of the Gestalt dialectic. Dramatically, she is an anticlimax, irrelevant now to the course of events.

Thus, though the victims of these two plays are felled by their perceptual fallacies, abetted by their survivors, the different authorial intentions--manifested in the degree of stylistic commitment to Naturalist tenets--yield opposing conclusions: In Spring Awakening, Moritz is conscious of his inferiority to his survivors; in Miss Julie the victim has no understanding of her fate and remains exploited to the end. Spring Awakening points toward hope, using suicide as a "lesson," whereas Miss Julie points (dramatically) toward despair, using suicide as an illustration.

CHAPTER TWO

Notes

[1] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, III,iii.

[2] Emile Zola, "Préface to Thérèse Raquin" in Oevres complètes Vol. XV (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966) p. 122. Translation by this writer.

[3] George Bernard Shaw, Major Barbara, in Bernard Shaw, Collected Plays Vol. III, ed. by D. H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1971) pp. 154-155.

[4] Zola, p. 123.

[5] Ibid., p. 123.

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzenund Nachteil der Historie," in Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in 2 Bände, ed. by Ivo Frenzel (Munich: Carl Hauser, 1973) pp. 119-120. This writer's translation.

[7] Frank Wedekind, Spring Awakening, tr. by Tom Osborn (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969) p. 40. All subsequent references from this edition.

[8] Ibid., p. 28.

[9] Some translations, Osborn's for instance, refer to Wedekind's word Bleichsucht as anaemia which is a constituent symptom, in fact, of chlorosis (=Bleichsucht). Vide Louis de Vries, (Ed.), German-English Science Dictionary, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

[10] Manfred Hahn, Frank Wedekind: Leben und Werk (Berlin: Aufbau, 1969) p. 15.

[11] Wedekind, p. 73.

[12] The baroness' name is not translated by Osborn.

[13] Kahlbauch--bare belly--is translated by Osborn as Hirsute. Vide p. 50.

[14] Wedekind, p. 59.

[15] Ibid., p 59.

[16] Ibid., p. 59.

[17] Ibid., p. 63.

[18] Ibid., p. 45.

[19] Ibid., p. 77.

[20] Hahn, p. 17.

[21] Wedekind, p. 80.

[22] Friedrich Rothe, Frank Wedekinds Dramen (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) p. 16.

[23] Goethe, Faust I, 11. 1535 - 1541.

[24] Goethe,'Faust Part I,'tr. by Louis MacNeice, in The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces (New York: Norton, 1979), Maynard Mack, general editor, pp. 382 - 383.

[25] Wedekind, p. 81.

[26] Goethe, l. 1674. Translated by this writer.

[27] Wedekind, p. 83.

[28] Goethe, 11 1810 - 1815.

[29] Mack, p. 389.

[30] Wedekind, p 45 ff.

[31] Ibid., p. 83.

[32] Indeed, Wedekind conducted a long-running dispute, not to say quarrel, with Gerhart Hauptmann, perhaps Germany's greatest

Naturalist playwright, whose reportorial note-taking habits and slavish commitment to the objectified drama he savagely caricatured in an early work, Die junge Welt.

[33] Osborn's translation of the teachers' names is not literal.

[34] Reform schools of pre-democratic Germany were a bête-noir to the bourgeois mind, houses of dreadful repression and brutality. Losing one's son to a reform school was tantamount to writing him off.

[35] Wedekind, p. 82.

[36] Ibid., p. 35.

[37] Ibid., p. 82.

[38] Ibid., p. 16.

[39] Vide reference no. 36.

[40] Wedekind, p. 16.

[41] Ibid., p. 15.

[42] Ibid., p. 33.

[43] The German is more emphatic: "Himmel--Herrgott--Teufel--Donnerwetter..."

[44] Wedekind, p. 31.

[45] Ibid., p. 31.

[46] Ibid., p. 11.

[47] Ibid., p. 12.

[48] Ibid., p. 17.

[49] Vide reference no. 38.

[50] Wedekind, p. 32.

[51] Ibid., p. 32.

[52] Ibid., p. 32.

[53] Ibid., p. 51.

[54] Ibid., p. 51.

[55] Ibid., p. 50.

[56] Ibid., p. 51.

[57] Ibid., p. 50.

[58] Ibid., p. 50.

[59] Ibid., p. 52.

[60] Ibid., p. 52.

[61] Ibid., p. 17.

[62] Ibid., p. 25.

[63] Maurice Beebe, 'Joyce and Aquinas. The Theory of Aesthetics," Philological Quarterly, 36 (1957), pp. 20 - 35.

[64] Wedekind, p. 48. The German--was suchst du hier?--is better translated as the more provocative "what are you doing here?"

[65] Ibid., p. 50.

[66] Ibid., p. 45.

[67] Ibid., p. 35.

[68] We have eschewed Osborn's less literal translation here. The German reads:

1. Darf ich dir eine Zigarette drehen?
2. Das Leben ist von einer ungeahnten Gemeinheit.
   Ich hätte nicht übel Lust, mich in die Zweige zu hängen.
3. Warten wir, bis wir Tee getrunken.

[69] Ibid., p. 36.

[70] Ibid., p. 30.

[71] Ibid., p. 16.

[72] Ibid., p. 17.

[73] August Strindberg, "Foreword," in Miss Julie, tr. by Elizabeth Sprigge (New York: Avon, 1965) pp. 74-87. All subsequent references from this edition. The Naturalists were fond of manifestoes outlining their theoretical orientations. Other such documents are, inter alias, Zola's preface to Thérèse Raquin, published in 1873; Zola's Le Roman experimental, 1880; Ludwig Büchner's Kraft und Stofflehre, 1855. Much lively discussion occurred in Germany between the rival groups of Berlin and Munich, with Heinrich and Julius Hart, Alberti, Conradi and Henkel as outstanding contributors.

[74] August Strindberg, Miss Julie, tr. by Elizabeth Sprigge (New York: Avon, 1965), p. 53. All subsequent references are from this edition.

[75] Ibid., p. 76.

[76] Ibid., p. 43.

[77] Ibid., p. 50.

[78] Ibid., p. 45.

[79] Ibid., p. 38.

[80] Ibid., p. 39.

[81] Ibid., p. 32.

[82] Ibid., p. 46.

[83] Ibid., p. 85.

[84] Ibid., p. 83.

[85] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 1900.

[86] The irony here is that Freud's work, valiantly labelled "scientific," has done yeoman service in pulling the arts from their empirical tracks by arguing for, and clinically establishing, an irreduceable and highly irrational core to man's nature.

[87] Strindberg, p. 36.

[88] Zola, p. 122.

[89] Strindberg, p. 83.

[90] Ibid., p. 78.

[91] Ibid., p. 79.

[92] Ibid., p. 32.

[93] Ibid., p. 57.

[94] Ibid., p. 28.

[95] Ibid., p. 57.

[96] Ibid., p. 71.

[97] Ibid., p. 72.

[98] Ibid., p. 73.

[99] Ibid., p. 27.

[100] Ibid., p. 56.

[101] Ibid., p. 72.

[102] Ibid., p. 72.

CHAPTER THREE

The Master Builder: Art is Long, Short is Life

Introduction

With Ibsen's Solness, we have come full cycle. Where for Wedekind suicide was an issue of personal confrontation with "Life" that needed to be transcended, and for Strindberg it was an inevitable demise of an inferior creature, for Ibsen it has become the cross-over point to which we alluded above (p. 1): life and art conjoined, the author's own death abreacted on the page.

In the Master Builder (Bygmester Solness), Ibsen incorporates many extra-textual facets. We will return to these below. For the moment, we may point out that Ibsen likened himself to Solness as "a man somewhat akin to me,"[1] and thus a character of particular interest to our discussion.

Utilizing neither the broad expressionistic strokes of Wedekind, nor the careful structures of Strindberg's psychological observations, Ibsen nevertheless uses symbolic insights to explore psychological states of being in The Master Builder. Like Strindberg's dreams, through which a "higher" reality may be glimpsed, the play's language is more than a mere rendition of reality. Nature, for instance, expresses a spiritual world, a Shadow- or nether-world, from which issues forth the mysterious, free-floating temptress Hilde Wangel. Nature, from which Solness "wills" Hilde to appear is thus a corollary

of human feeling. And the tower from which Solness falls may be a pre-Freudian symbol of masculine achievements at their heights from which there is no return to an unchanged world; that (dreaded) discovery that goals and achievements bring, not the satisfaction of recognition and material reward, but the very opposite: the even greater need for more goals to be conquered.[2] Solness has not (yet) learned that goals, like any experience, can only be of value in and of themselves. The tower may well symbolize Solness' own emptiness and aimlessness at the top: he can go neither forward nor back.

In this sense, The Master Builder is a transitional play between Ibsen's long "realist" period--spent almost entirely in Germany--and the beginning of his last "symbolic" period back in Norway. Written in 1892, the play opens the last period which also includes Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken. In these last plays, Ibsen was less concerned with man in relation to society than with inner conflicts. The stress on love versus duty--as in the social plays--remains, but duty is rendered more as a negation of the joy of life. Here he may be contrasted with Wedekind's Masked Man, to whom duty, we recall, was necessarily linked to Free Will, if there was to be "morality."[3] Wedekind, too, found the restrictions of "Naturalist" theatre too confining to render so ineffably personal an experience as searching for meaning without transcending those confines into a surrealistic image.

Thus, Ibsen's play begins with the Naturalistic "three-walled" drawing room of his earlier period, with dialogue between Solness and the Broviks, concerning professional matters, and moves outside those limitations, dissolving the realistic framework. The memorable episodes here are not the clashes of will so characteristic of the drmatist's earlier period, but a mélange of brooding over the past, (the exposition of the fire, the death of the children, Solness' first encounter with Hilde, etc.) and attempts at coming to terms with the present, (the youth-age conflict and the incoherent discussions about architecture). These conversations are elegiac scenes of people looking at their unfulfilled lives, and show desperate attempts at communication, reminiscent of Chekhov's characters' isolated and aimless speeches. These attempts at reifying the inner world are suggestive of the themes of isolation, paradise lost and love's futility of the expressionist dramas of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco. The intense loneliness of later modern novels, too, and the pathos of absurd comedy are foreshadowed.

Indeed, The Master Builder closes a developmental gap in Ibsens's dramas not unlike the later Strindberg's expressionistic Damascus (1898). Ibsen began his career with highly Romantic characters like Peer Gynt, who symbolized the basically irreconcileable forces of opposition in man--the mutually exclusive "ambitions" of being emperor and clown. Written in verse, Peer Gynt dramatized the clash between an ego ideal and the Scandinavian underworld image, trolls, representing uninhibited desire and

Faust-like self-compromise. This Romantic image of man, though not as glorified as true Romantic man (as in Goethe and Shakespeare) nevertheless makes Romantic assertions about man. This all-conquering hero was not to be punctured until Solness appeared. Now, layer by layer, he is laid bare to Nothingness in a dramatic tour de force that reveals how much life is lived on unconscious levels. The realistic drama, showing outside action, moves "inside" to become subjective drama, where those peeled-away layers are exposed. Strindberg's Miss Julie, we see, is very much after this fashion.

Ibsen's language, thus, becomes suggestive of inner states of being. With Hilde's entry, the dialogue shifts permanently out of the realistic realm, taking on inner tensions and unrealistic forms: the father-son defiance, suggesting guilt for denying a chance for the younger generation; the "make-room" metaphor, representing the intolerable professional encroachments on his station in the world of builders; the image of the tower, suggesting lost personal power; the talk of "castles in the air," suggesting attempts at recapturing lost artistic potency; Solness' inability to sacrifice himself for "art," thus keeping him at a builder's level; the metaphor of the fire, suggesting razing the old to make room for the new; and finally, the Faustian "power" of conjuring "helpers," one of whom proves to be the (Mephistotelian) Hilde. Unlike Strindberg, however, the deeper layers are more clearly mythological and universal, where Strindberg's characters struggle with private anxieties and preoccupations. We might say that Solness' language

suggest the motivational forces of Freud's unconscious, and Ibsen's language suggest the collective unconscious of Jung.

In this sense, we may look at the figure of Hilde. Fashioned after several of Ibsen's female encounters--as we shall see later--she is at once seductive woman and idolatrous child. Thus, she resembles C. G. Jung's "anima": the feminine element of the male psyche that Goethe called the "Eternal Feminine" (das ewig Weibliche).[4] In Goethe's Faust II, the Eternal Feminine is nothing less than the symbol for life, the irrational ground and irresistible force which is prior to all else, reason included, and drawing Faust "onward" to fulfilment and death.[5] To Jung, the anima also has two aspects, benevolent and malefic.[6] Often personified as a witch or priestess, the anima has links with forces of darkness. A man is made aware of the anima's presence through such vague feelings as moods, prophetic hunches, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature and, importantly, his relationship to the unconscious.

In its individual manifestation, Jung writes, "the character of a man's anima is as a rule shaped by his mother."[7] A mother with a negative influence results in a man's anima expressing itself in irritable, depressed moods, uncertainty, and insecurity. Such a negative anima-figure endlessly repeats the theme: "I am nothing. Nothing makes any sense." Such dark moods, Jung writes, "can even lure a man to suicide, in which case the anima becomes a death demon."[8]

We might suggest that Solness, in his defiance of God and of old Brovik; in his fire fantasy of having caused the death of the

children, he has rid himself of his rivals for his wife, Aline. Seen Oedipally, Aline thus becomes his mother. Certainly Aline is a lethargic, jealous and unhappy presence in the play. Solness engages in masochistic bouts of guilt over Aline's frustration in her life's goal; over the death of his sons; and over his own work's totality as "nothing."[9] Moreover, he does not verbalize these predilections but for Hilde's presence on stage. Conversely, he has seen no happiness for himself, no creative fulfillment, until Hilde comes into his life. And finally, like Faust, he "wills" her, unconsciously, as a daemonic "helpmate" into his life.[10] Basically, then, we may see Hilde as a Mephistotelian, anima figure.[11]

By corollary, Solness becomes Faustian. Like Faust, he defies God, daring Him to deter him from his plan of abandoning church-building.[12] Like Faust, he is at the top of his professional life --a doer, a worker, and also unaware of the organic (aesthetic) interrelationship of the actor and the thing acted upon, but desperately seeking to revitalize his professional and personal life with the abandoned ideals of youth. Unlike Faust, however, Solness has retained an adolescent egocentricity, with its jealousies and impetuous behaviour, including recklessness. (We see this in his treatment of Kaia and in the tower climb.) Moreover, Solness is tragically flawed, in an almost classical manner: there is no pardon from God, and he is blinded to the dangers of the final temptation from his anima figure, now become malevolent.

Ibsen, then, has reaffirmed the dramatist's imaginative powers,

at the end of his own life, consciously eschewing the positivist limitations of Naturalist drama and uninhibitedly transcending them.

Plot

Halvard Solness, a dynamic and successful builder has achieved a fine local prominence in his craft. He has supplanted his former boss, Knut Brovik, and put him in his own employ. Even Ragnar, Knut's son, is working for Solness, carrying out the more prosaic duties of "stress calculations."[13] But Solness fears Ragnar's ambitions--to do unto him what Solness had done unto Knut--and refuses to view (and approve) the young man's designs, thus holding him back from his own career development. Indeed, despite his apparent success and confident personality, Solness is a desperately insecure man. He cannot relinquish his metaphorical hold on the peak of his profession, to "make way," inevitably, for the demands of youth.[14] Moreover, since the fire that destroyed his wife's ancestral home, and the ensuing deaths of their children, his wife has been living an uncommitted life of apathy and ennui. Solness has "subdivided" the property on which the home was placed and has built homes of his own design on it, thus giving himself the opportunity for career advancement. Gradually, however, he has convinced himself that he has "willed" the fire--by neglecting to repair a crack in the chimney, which, as it turns out, was not the cause of the fire --in order that he might profit from the consequences. He thus suffers from guilt and self-loathing.[15]

Suddenly, youth--in the form of the twenty-two year old Hilde Wangel--arrives to confront him. Ten years before, when she was still a child, she had greatly admired Solness when she observed him climbing high to place a ceremonial wreath about the spire of a church freshly completed by him. She had heard him shout defiantly and the sound of harps had been in the air. Moreover, he had promised her--with many kisses--to present her with her own kingdom. Now she has come to collect her prize.

Through Hilde, Solness finds that he has lost his fear of youth. She persuades him to authorize Ragnar's work. Moreover, she now seems able to restore him with the confidence that he had lost and the creative enterprise which he badly needs. She will not, however, force herself between Solness and his wife, when that woman has revealed her inmost secrets to her. She is a "bird of prey" only to a certain extent.[16] She will build "castles in the air" with him--and then she will leave.[17] But first he must show her the same heroic form which she had so idolized ten years before: he must hang a ceremonial wreath atop the tower of a building just completed. His wife pleads with Solness, now ten years older and not free from vertigo, to cease the madness. Driven by Hilde's expectations, however, he ascends the tower. Finally he reaches the top and places the wreath. In that act he plunges downward, amidst gasps of horror and Hilde's triumphant shouts, and is shattered on the rocks below.

Several themes are dealt with by Ibsen. The first is what is

now referred to as the "generation gap." Solness is preoccupied with the fact of his declining years, the cyclicity of life and its inevitable consequence of youth seeking to take a rightful place among their elders. With no sons of his own, he has not battled with an heir to the family throne. There is, consequently, an insufferable paternalism in his treatment of Ragnar, his apprentice. Unwilling to acknowledg Ragnar's growing abilities and maturity, he shuts him out of building projects like an irritable father denying his son the keys to the family car:[18]

> ...he hasn't learnt anything--not thoroughly. Except draughtsmanship, of course.

Indeed, there is in Solness an almost maniacal dread of losing his position of masculine dominance. He shamelessly harrasses his much younger female employee, Kaia, who is economically dependent on him, who worships him, in order to flatter his sexual ego. Having defied the elder Brovik (who could symbolize his own father); having contributed--consciously or unconsciously--to the death of his own children; defying, finally, God from atop his church steeple, Solness projects an image of perpetual youth and immaturity, unable graciously to accept the inevitable turn of time's wheel.

To be sure, the world conspires with him in this deceit, as in certain others. The Broviks harbour a petty and irrational hatred for him, unable to stand alone, unable to negotiate with their employer. Kaia is an unimaginative and soft-willed creature, with so little faith in herself that she deceives her lover for her employer. And Aline, his wife, lets Solness believe in his own myth of having

sacrificed the boys, by implying a mental disturbance in him:[19]

Mrs. Solnes: There's no home here, Halvard.

Solness: No, you may well say it. (Heavily) And God knows whether you aren't right in <u>that</u>--that it won't be any better for us in the new house either.

Mrs. Solness: It never will be. Just as empty. Just as desolate. There as here.

Solness (angrily): But why to goodness have we built it then? Can you tell me that?

Mrs. Solness: No, you must answer that yourself.

Solness (glancing suspiciously at her): What do you mean by <u>that</u>, Aline?

Mrs. Solness: What do I mean?

Solness: Yes, damn it all--! You said it so queerly. As if you had something at the back of your mind.

Mrs. Solness: No, I can truly assure you--

Solness (going nearer): Thank you, --I know what I know. And I can see and hear, too, Aline. You may be sure of that!

Mrs. Solness: But what is all this? What is it?

Solness (stopping in front of her): You don't, for instance, find an insidious, hidden meaning in the most innocent word I speak?

Mrs. Solness: <u>I</u>, you say! <u>I</u> do that!

Solness (laughing): Ha, ha, ha! But that's reasonable enough, Aline! When you have to deal with a sick man in the house, then--

Mrs. Solness (full of anxiety): Sick! Are you <u>ill</u>, Halvard?

Solness (breaking out): A half-crazy man, then! A man who's out of his mind! Call me what you like.

Mrs. Solness (fumbling for the chair-back and sitting down): Halvard, --for God's sake--!

> Solness: But you're mistaken, both of you. Both you and the doctor. There's nothing like that the matter with me. (He walks up and down the room. Mrs. Solness follows him anxiously with her eyes. Then he goes across to her. He speaks quietly.) In fact there's not a thing in the world wrong with me.
>
> Mrs. Solness: No, there isn't, is there? But then, what's upsetting you so much?
>
> Solness: It's this, that I'm often on the point of sinking under this appalling burden of debt--
>
> Mrs. Solness: Debt, you say! But you're not in debt to anyone, Halvard!
>
> Solness (quietly, with emotion): Boundlessly in debt to you--to you, --to you, Aline.

Mrs. Solness here resembles Strindberg's Laura (in The Father) who also misleads the Captain into doubting his sanity.[20]

A further theme, quite inseperable from the issue of the generation gap, is that of professional ambition. Here, Solness "resembles" the mature Ibsen more closely.[21] Solness is at the height of his opportunism. When the old and sick Brovik, for instance, begs in a dying wish, for his apparently proficient son to be given a chance at managing a project, Solness coldly denies him:[22]

> Brovik: ...Am I to die then without certainty? Without any joy? Without faith and confidence in Ragnar? ...to die in such absolute poverty?
>
> Solness: ..You must die as best you can.

Solness has exploited opportunity to his own end. When his wife's ancestral home burns to the ground, he simply appropriates the land for his own career purposes. And the master Brovik, in a manner to which the above exchange clearly hints, has been dethroned and pushed aside by the apprentice Solness.

Significantly, however, Solness is no artist. He took no degrees in architecture, for instance. More the builder, developer and man of action, he suffers from the man of action's sense of unfulfillment at not being able to walk both roads at the same time, rationalizing that the practical world is an equivalent education to a formal one:[23]

> Hilde: Why don't you call yourself an architect like the others?
>
> Solness: I didn't have the proper training for that. What I know,--for the most part I've found it out for myself.

Thus, the relationship between people and the personal spaces they occupy is, as aesthetic issue, unexplored by Solness and given no greater play than "houses for human beings."[24] That there is no awareness, even, of an aesthetic relationship between public and private buildings is seen in his preference for putting steeples onto homes--an anomalous architectural practice for private dwellings in northern Europe, then and now.

Of greater importance are the narrowing psychological confines into which this interventionist, exploitative and non-reflective behaviour is forcing him. Solness has moved from building churches --large enclosed spaces, accommodating public groups--to "homes," of private, smaller spaces. Meanwhile, the succeeding generation of builders has been clamouring for him to "make room"--which he cannot do. He has arrogated all professional decisions--spaces--unto himself, and shut himself into his private fears. Indeed, no other person, until Hilde, is allowed in his own space. Finally, atop

the tower, he has run out of "space," figuratively and literally.

Solness as Gestalt

Solness believes that he is gifted with a power in which he can "tell" what others are thinking.[25] He is a reifier of the will. He believes, he wishes, he wills--and it is done.[26] This hypnotic charm makes woman after woman succumb to his attractions. But, as we shall see, it exacts a terrible retributive price on the hypnotist: he must allow the young Hilde to lure him to his death in order that she may preserve her high ideal of his character, and to preserve in him the hypnotic sense of power.

Working hard moreover, all his life, he has been manipulating his Umwelt with this skill, taking opportunities for personal and professional enrichment. Thus Aline, Kaia, the Broviks--all have been, and still are, fully under the master's control.

But Solness lacks what Hilde call a "robust conscience."[27] Strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's self-built Übermensch (and, by implication, the very quality Miss Julie also lacked) a man with a robust conscience is untroubled by the need for human sacrifice in order to attain his goal:[28]

> Hilde: Oh I think it's absolutely stupid...that one daren't reach out for one's own happiness. For one's own life! Just because there's someone standing in the way that one knows!
>
> Solness: Someone that one has no right to put aside.
>
> Hilde: I wonder whether one hasn't the right to, really?

Hilde is a "bird of prey," to whom other women's husbands are fair game.[29] The reason she does not make off with Solness as a prize is not out of some pity for the desiccated Aline, but for the fact that Solness remains chained to Aline by a "sickly conscience."[30]

When Solness, now, faces the past, he must come to terms with what he had willed and wished "inwardly, silently."[31] In addition, his neurotic guilt feelings ("crushing debt");[32] his obsessive fear of falling and his sado-masochistic impulses ("salutory self-torture")[33] make him similar to Ibsen's own Hedda Gabler and Strindberg's Miss Julie, in that the result is his impaired perceptions of his Umwelt.

We see, first, repeated instances of Projection. Solness projects, for example, his own opportunism onto the younger generation: as he arrogated "room" for himself, so the younger Brovik is seen as threatening, even though there would seem to be sufficient work for all.[34]

Similarly, his projection of "inward, silent" wishes onto his Umwelt--though there have been some obvious returns--is psychologically counter-productive, since it makes the manipulatee dependent on him. From the literature on hypnosis, we see that one definition of hypnosis is "suggestion," that is, the hypnotist suggests, after the required psychological and environmental context is prepared, agreeable alternatives to the subject, alternatives the subject himself acknowledges, but is for some reason(s) unable to realize. Indeed, it is trite knowledge that subjects will not likely act to harm or embarrass themselves. That, on some post-hypnotic occasions, people appear to

behave in such a manner suggests more a release of unconscious motivators than the alleged manipulation of the hypnotist. That Solness' "subjects" are, indeed, willing accomplices to his manipulation can be seen by (a) their own weak conditions: Aline, clearly deranged by the death of her children and perversely more animated by the loss of dolls than the loss of life; and Kaia, a shy, virginal and economically dependent woman and (b) the "rewards," as it were, that befall them for their "cooperation." Thus, Aline can maintain Solness in a vise of guilt over the fire, wringing from him unquestioned material obligations; she can maintain her need for jealous control over his actions; and she can claim social "allies," in the form of the doctor, through whom she can build a martyr's niche for herself. Similarly, Kaia has replaced Mrs. Solness as the object of tenderness for the Master Builder--without social prestige, but clearly not without an intimate confidence nor the stuff that nourishes dreams. While risking nothing--she remains betrothed to Ragnar--she can receive the aphrodisiacal attentions of the powerful Solness.

In terms of Introjection, we see Solness, not equipped with a "robust conscience," assuming the "crushing burden" of guilt over Aline's unfulfillment as mother and the accidental death of the children. Believing himself to have "willed" their death, he rationalizes the crack in the flue to have caused the fire. That he did not repair it when he had the chance, he reasons, is the function of the unconscious. The sado-masochistic impulses

we see, the obsessive fear of falling, these "salutory self-tortures" are the cover-up for his neurotic guilt feelings.

Moreover, Solness does not obey the "law of change" that Ibsen prescribed in Little Eyolf. "Chained to a dead woman," as Hilde describes him, by his own admission a man who cannot "live a joyless life," he nevertheless tries to hang on to the present, denying everyone access to his space, not unlike Aline living depressedly in the past. This inability to change suggests a fixation in one-half of the Gestalt mode of perception, brought about by his neurotic obsession with guilt.

In a similarly obsessive manner, Solness believes himself capable of "willing" his "ministers" to appear. By example, he cites his power over Kaia. Even Hilde Wangel is an odd appearance. She is real enough--others beside Solness see her--but the past of which she speaks and from which she has come to remind Solness of his promises is less obviously real. There are, for instance, long minutes of conversation initially to remind him of events at Lysanger, ten years previous, punctuated with remedial phrases like, "are you very forgetful?" and "surely I don't have to remind you about that?" and met by the astonished Solness with "but did I really say all this" and "what on earth did I do after that?" etc.[35] Further, there is Hilde's successful enlistment of Solness to climb the tower to hang a ceremonial wreath, despite the competing claim of Aline that he has never climbed a tower in his life.[36] As for other mysterious exposition--that Solness was to have "sung" atop

the tower at Lysanger, despite his avowal that he has never sung a note in his life; that he was to have promised her a "Kingdom," though he professes no recollection of having done so--all would appear to suggest a propensity for him to confuse fact with fancy, to suggest a dangerous belief in powers of reification:[37]

> All this you've just told me--it must be something you've dreamt...Listen...Or...wait a moment! There's more in this than meets the eye, I tell you...I must have thought it all. I must have willed it...wished it...desired it. And then...Mightn't that be the explanation? All right, damn it...! So I did do it then!

We may view this "willing" phenomenon as Retrojection. The "will" is imposed on the Umwelt--even Hilde' name was given her by Solness at Lysanger ten years previous[38]--and, symbolically, it is reflected back to him in the form of a fatal anima figure, the troll. Psychologically, the siren song of the anima is the retroflective force of the Will, the failed attempt to force one's embodiment on the world. Life, it would seem, will not permit Solness to escape its reality. Conjuring shadowy "helpers" is seeking short-cuts to survival. In Wedekind's terms, it would be immoral: though "free will" is being expressed, without "duty" it is immoral.[39] Life requires an unmediated, phenomenological encounter. Solness has renounced his life's calling for the flattering attentions of the youthful Hilde; that is, he has fallen in love with his own creation. Like Moritz's narcissism, this is the ultimate retrojective position, from which there is no return.

The Invitation

Does the Master Builder's Umwelt wish him dead? We have alluded above to the position of Aline. On one level, Solness is quite right about Aline: but for the tragic fire that claimed her children, and Solness' subsequent immersion in his work, in addition to his apparent eye for women, her life presumably would not have been so wasted:[40]

> ...Aline--she had her life-work, too. Just as much as I had mine...But her life-work had to be ruined, crushed, all knocked to pieces--that mine could break its way through to--to something like a great victory. For you must know that Aline--she had her gift for building too...for building up the soul of little children, Hilde. Building up children's souls that they could grow up into balanced, noble, beautiful forms. So that they could rise up into independent, full-grown human souls. That was what Aline had a gift for. And all this--there it lies now. Unused and useless, for ever. And serving no purpose in the world. Just like a heap of ruins after a fire.

But the guilt he carries over this "waste" is not fully of his own making. As mentioned, Aline stands to gain certain social regard for her martyr's role: she has lost her children. Her stock can only increase with Solness' death, the insincerity of social class notwithstanding.

Thus, she subtly weaves a pattern of reinforcing his doubts about his sanity. Aline has apparently invited the doctor to make a discrete examination of Solness' mental state.[41] And she distorts and discards Solness' concerns for her, making them sound as though they were fears for his own health:[42]

> Mrs. Solness (getting up slowly): What is at the back of all this? You might as well say it at once.
>
> Solness: But there isn't anything at the back of it. I've never done you any wrong. Not knowingly and intentionally, anyway. And yet all the same--it feels as if a crushing debt lay on me and weighed me down.
>
> Mrs. Solness: A debt to me?
>
> Solness: Mostly to you.
>
> Mrs. Solness: Then you are--ill, after all, Halvard.
>
> Solness (heavily): Maybe so. Or something of the kind.

Of the Broviks' irrational hatred for Solness, mention has been made. And in Ragnar's disparaging comments about Solness' fitness to climb the tower lies an almost Oedipal lust to see the master destroyed, particularly as it is now mixed with a desire to avenge his father's untimely death:[43]

> In his own way, he is afraid. He, the great master builder. Taking their life's happiness from other people--just as he's done to my father and me--he's not afraid of that. But a simple thing like climbing up a wretched scaffold--he takes jolly good care not to risk that!

Finally, there is the anima, Hilde. Her conversations with Solness--about "robust consciences," Vikings, plunder and rape, burning and brutality seem to cater to his search for Nietzschean self-assertion. Hilde ministers to it by suggesting she would be captivated by anyone who would display a little of that form of behaviour. Thus it is Hilde who plants in Solness' mind the idea which eventually leads to his death:[44]

> Hilde: ...Do you know what a castle in the air's like?

> Solness: It's the most beautiful thing in the world, you say.
>
> Hilde (getting up impetuously and pushing aside the idea with a gesture): Yes, of course! Castles in the air, they're so easy to hide in. And easy to build, too. (Looking scornfully at him.) Especially, for master builders that have a--conscience that can't stand heights.
>
> Solness (getting up): After today we two will build together, Hilde.
>
> Hilde (with a half-doubtful smile): A genuine castle in the air?
>
> Solness: Yes. One with a foundation under it.
>
> (Ragnar Brovik comes out from the house. He carries a large green wreath with flowers and silk ribbons.)
>
> Hilde (with an exclamation of joy): The wreath! Oh that'll be absolutely glorious!

On the one hand, by constantly challenging Solness' "fear of retribution"[45] as nothing more than a fear of heights, and on the other giving Solness the chance to reify his promise of "castles in the air" by hanging the wreath on this tower Hilde clearly manipulates the hapless Solness to the top of the tower.

Conclusion

Like Goethe's Faust Ibsen's Solness is quasi-autobiographical. The daemonic lure that the creative person must face is a product of his own imagination, but for all that, it must be stared down. Goethe seized on the archetype--the eternal denial--to confront his Faust. Ibsen brings forth--from the wild redoubts of the forests--his deadly anima to confront and lure Solness. In two of the later plays--

John Gabriel Borkman and Master Builder--there is a "possessed" hero, at the prime of his life, seeking new meaning by attempting to reify his soul's vision, who encounters an unattached, mysterious and daemonic stranger, is "intergrated" by that daemonic force and finally, challenged by it to perform an extraordinary feat, experiences a last tragic vision. But possesssion of daemonic knowledge is punishable with death--there is no living with it. Thus, Solness and Borkman are quite close to Faust.

The crucial point here is that, like Faust, whether or not they died by their own hand has become irrelevant. By compromising himself with Mephistopheles, Faust--so far as he knew--fully sealed his doom. Similarly, Solness and Borkman "know" that they are doomed because of the mortal crime they have committed: they have killed love--sacrificed another human being--for the sake of their "calling." Ibsen seems to be bringing to fruition his earlier Romantic characters--Brand and Peer Gynt--reifying them, as it were, not only for obvious dramatic purposes, but for personal ones.

The "realistic" evocation of mood, the astonishing sense of immediacy in Master Builder is paradoxical, given its liberal use of transcendental symbols. For Ibsen, however, the mood was real enough. Like Solness, he had his Hilde.[46] Emilie Bardach, a young eighteen-year-old Austrian woman, apparently of gay Viennese charm, encountered the ageing dramatist in the summer of 1889, below the Brenner in the Alps. Her unconventional frankness in admitting a preference for other women's husbands, the touch of the troll in her, shocked

Ibsen, but it also intrigued him immensely. The two were often together, hours at a time, engaged in long animated conversations and walks along mountain trails. In her journals, the young Emilie reports a most tender Ibsen, one given even to thoughts of divorce from his wife, Susanna. Ibsen evidently was experiencing some of the feelings of intoxication he was later to bestow on Solness. The two corresponded for some three years after that initial encounter. Unlike Strindberg--who married his Viennese charmer, Frida Uhl--Ibsen broke off the relationship. What Fräulein Bardach gave Ibsen, then, is not so much the character of Hilde Wangel, as the bittersweet experience of age longing for youth, an experience that the master crystallized into art.

It is the reification of ideas--the heart of the creative process--that allows us to see the particularly reciprocal relationship between the suicide and his survivor(s). Mephisto is as surely a creature of Faust as Faust is of Goethe, as Hilde is of Solness and as Fräulein Bardach is of Ibsen. Moreover, Fräulein Bardach gave Ibsen a picture of himself in Solness: after witnessing the play, she remarked, according to Francis Bull: "I did not see myself, but I saw him. There is only little of me in Hilde: but in Solness there is little that is not Ibsen."[47] Faust, too, was a life-long pre-occupation of Goethe, changing over the years with the author's advancing age, not finally completed until the year before his death at age 82. And that Mephisto is manipulated by Faust as much as he is manipulated by Mephisto is seen by the complex experience of

temptation:[48]

Die Zeit ist kurz, die Kunst ist lang.
Ich dächt, ihr liesset Euch belehren.
Asoziiert Euch mit einem Poeten,
Laßt den Herrn in Gedanken schweifen
Und alle edlen Qualitäten
Auf Euren Ehrenscheitel häufen:
Des Löwen Mut,
Des Hirsches Schnelligkeit,
Des Italieners feurig Blut,
Des Norden Dau'rbarkeit.
Laßt ihn Euch das Geheimnis finden,
Grossmut und Arglist zu verbinden
Und Euch mit warmen Jugendtrieben
Nach einem Plane zu verlieben.
Möchte selbst solch einen Herren kennen,
Würd ihn Herrn Mikrokosmus nennen.

(Time is short, art is long.
You could do with a little artistic advice.
Confederate with one of the poets
And let him flog his imagination
To heap all virtues on your head,
A head with such a reputation:
Lion's bravery,
Stag's velocity,
Fire of Italy,
Northern tenacity.
Let him find out the secret art
Of combining craft with a noble heart
And of being in love like a young man,
Hotly, but working to a plan.
Such a person--I'd like to meet him;
"Mr. Microcosm" is how I'd greet him.[49])

It is this reciprocity of the creative will, then, that is suggestive of the Gestalt bond between the individuals of the play, and allows us, as we will argue below, to build our own self-image.

CHAPTER THREE

Notes

[1] Harold Clurman, Ibsen, (New York: MacMillan, 1977), p. 168.

[2] The tower, it appears, is an illustration of the pervasive nature of our cultural "myths," and the difficulty we experience in trying to escape our own Weltanschauung forged by those myths: few critics have eschewed the Freudian lure of this symbol.

[3] Frank Wedekind, Spring Awakening, tr. by Tom Osborn (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969), p. 82.

[4] Goethe, Faust II, l. 12110.

[5] Ibid., l. 12111.

[6] C. G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, (New York: Dell, 1976) p. 115.

[7] Ibid., p. 115.

[8] Ibid., p. 186.

[9] Ibid., p. 187.

[10] Henrik Ibsen, The Master Builder, tr. by Una Ellis-Fermor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) p. 176. All references from this edition.

[11] Although Hilde is not so, completely: unlike Mephisto, she is no "Geist der stets verneint" (an always contradictory soul) and, clearly, she knows fairly well the workings of a man's affections, where Mephisto knew only of his libido.

[12] Ibsen, p. 205.

[13] Ibid., p. 165.

[14] Ibid., p. 141.

[15] Ibid., p. 177.

[16] Ibid., p. 195.

[17] Ibid., p. 205.

[18] Ibid., p. 127.

[19] Ibid., p. 161.

[20] August Strindberg, "The Father," in Classics of the Modern Theatre, Alvin B. Kernan, editor (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1965) p. 107.

[21] The facts of Ibsen's life would deny, by contrast, Solness' dread of youth. To be sure, the young literary lion, Knut Hamsun, was--with apparent lack of restraint--rudely banging on Ibsen's edifice; and Strindberg himself, twenty-one years Ibsen's junior, referred to the master as "that famous old Norwegian blue-stocking." Vide Clurman, op. cit., p. 205.

[22] Ibsen, p. 129.

[23] Ibid., p. 169.

[24] Ibid., p. 169.

[25] Ibid., p. 176.

[26] Ibid., p. 178

[27] Ibid., p. 179.

[28] Ibid., p. 195.

[29] Ibid., p. 195.

[30] Ibid., p. 177.

[31] Ibid., p. 177.

[32] Ibid., p. 162.

[33] Ibid., p. 138.

[34] Ibid., p. 128.

[35] Ibid., p. 146.

[36] Ibid., p. 185.

[37] Ibid., p. 146 ff.

[38] Ibid., p. 153.

[39] Wedekind, p. 82.

[40] Ibsen, p. 172.

[41] Ibid., p. 207.

[42] Ibid., p. 162.

[43] Ibid., p. 200.

[44] Ibid., p 197.

[45] Ibid., p. 171.

[46] F. L. Lucas, The Drama of Ibsen and Strindberg, (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1962), p. 250. Ibsen also knew Hildur Anderson, a gifted young Norwegian pianist, who apparently addressed the old master's literary sensibilities: several instances in their relationship crop up in the play. She seems more to have been a threat to the Ibsen marriage than Frl̈ein Bardach.

[47] Ibsen, p. 249.

[48] Goethe, Faust I, 1. 1787-1802.

[49] "Mr. Microcosm": i.e., man viewed as the epitome of the universe. From Goethe's Faust, tr. by Louis MacNeice, in Maynard Mack, general editor, The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces (New York: Norton, 1973) p. 432.

CONCLUSION

The Sacrifice of Suicide

Death does not come to us from outside, like some thief, but is omnipresent from birth, within us. Freud wrote that death is the aim of all life. We might say that the aim of the suicide is off, living as he does with the mistaken notion that he can give quality to his life by choosing the time, place and means of his death. In truth, it is the opposite: life is given its quality through death--death as the completion of life's Gestalt--which takes its meaning through the aggregate of the sum total of all life. As we have seen, in this manner it becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

In one sense, the suicide remains, if guiltily, a fascination. Here is a person, who, right or wrong, has done what most of us fear. He has chosen to go to that country from "whence no traveller returns." If, on the other hand, Socrates is correct in saying that the fear of death is a vanity, since it pretends knowledge of what is unknown, it follows that one's morbid fascination is narcissistic, and avoids meaningful confrontation with what is before us: life, or how to live it better.

Each suicide, we have seen, is a singular, unique and quite ungeneralizeable beheading of its own life. What common denominators we have drawn have been made possible only by a conscious structuring of the dramatic facts to "fit" a theoretical model whose keenly felt

sense it was to give order to the chaos of the experience. Indeed, the very artificiality of these dramatic experiences--we have been discussing plays, not "life"--invites the artificiality of the investigation. Stripped now, of a didactic theory, we are left to our own weakened efforts at understanding the puzzle of suicide.

Much has been made of the Aristotelian dictum of katharsis --the purgation of pity and fear. Aristotle himself required "identification" with a noble, embattled hero, brought down by a personal flaw, fully according to the dictates of the Fates. Finer sensibilities have argued that pity and fear--far from being "purged"--are elicited from the audience during a dramatic presentation: that it is useless to leave the theatre drained of such high emotions, indeed, that we are to be filled with them.[1]

There is much value in the latter position, particularly when we deal with dramatic suicides. What do I know of my own reality if I leave a play with the knowledge of suicide as a fait accompli? Identifying with the hero--besides being a somewhat perverse suggestion --puts a halt to the dramatic experience with all the truncated thud of a fallen hero. For a Brechtian moment, let us defy the identifying process and join with the creative one: let us reify our own trolls. Then we see that the value of these plays is illustrated in Jesus' challenge: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

In our inability to identify with these characters--in our aversion to so "unfinished" an end--we come to the opposite of

of their despair. We come to hope. There is, I believe, a symbolic hope embedded in these plays. Solness, certainly, would permit such a reading. For Wedekind, hope lay in the lesson the Masked Man drew for Melchior, at Moritz's expense. Even Strindberg saw "hope" for Jean, arguing in his Introduction that Jean would probably end his days as a hotelier.[2]

Each of us is embedded in a network of relationships wherein we stand close--sometimes very close--to one or more persons. Like the survivors in these plays, we are seen with a symbolic hope by these people: the quality of their lives is a measure of our relationship with them. We are, often, their very alternatives. Perhaps we even have the power of life over them.

Suicide, therefore, becomes a symbolic act for the survivors, symbolizing our own inadequate life forms, our own impaired perceptions. We have seen that the Umwelt of these plays--institutional tyranny, psycholgical brutality and idealized expectations --in each case imperfectly perceived by the suicide, would have remained unchanged, regardless of the act taking place; whatever "change" occurred was within the suicidal character.[3] Melchior, a survivor, understood this when Moritz "invited" him into the metaphysical distance of death. To save himself, he asked: "does [suicide] help?"[4] Had he asked the same question earlier, it might have saved Moritz.

We have seen how this close interrelationship between the characters--the dramatic Gestalt--is a symbol of the functional

reciprocity of the artist and his work. Ibsen, in his apparent identity with Solness, paraphrases the paradox of suicide: triumphantly, he sacrifices Solness. Similarly, Julie is foredoomed by history and biology, and Moritz is a didactic counterpoint. Julie, Moritz and Solness serve a dramatic and a philosophical purpose: their creators would not have made them otherwise. Similarly, all suicide can be seen as "sacrifice," to affirm our own survival. And in that sense, all deaths become a form of suicide: no one takes my life from me but that I lay it down of my own accord.

We may not, therefore, declare a life as wasted without becoming aware of its sacrifice. Indeed, we understand nothing --using "understand" in its full coinage--until we understand what life is not: if nothing, life is a potentiality. Aristotle's response to Plato's denial of poetry takes on no more powerful a stance than when seen in this light. The drama has shown us the potential of suicide. We can never know "why"--despite the structured "how" that this thesis has sought to provide--the choice for death is ever made by another human being. Only in the transport of a metaphor, a play, can the limitations of language--the silence at the heart of experience--be transcended; when, indeed, we are free from the gravitational pull of competing bodies of knowledge, can we drift into the depths of our own potential toward a deeper and more distant understanding. The genius of these plays lies in their ability to transport us on

that voyage. They provide us with a readiness without which we will not hear the story of our survivors.

CONCLUSION

Notes

[1] Ephraim Lessing, The Hamburg Dramaturgy, tr. by E. C. Beasly and Helen Zimmern (London, 1879) p. 38. Lessing writes: "...we suddenly find ourselves filled with profound pity for those whom a fatal stream has carried so far, and full of terror at the consciousness that a similar stream might also thus have borne ourselves."

[2] August Strindberg, Miss Julie, tr. by Elizabeth Sprigge (New York: Avon, 1965) p. 80.

[3] Vide p. 6, this study, on the Gestalt perception.

[4] Frank Wedekind, Spring Awakening tr. by Tom Osborn (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969) p. 82.

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